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Correction: In Catherine Flower, 'Room for experiment: gallery films and vertical time from Maya Deren to Eija Liisa Ahtila', *Screen* vol. 45, no. 4 (2004), Maya Deren's film *Meshes of the Afternoon* was incorrectly titled throughout. We apologise for this error.

# 'A fine and private place': the cinematic spaces of the London Underground

CHARLOTTE BRUNSDON

The 1997 film *The Wings of the Dove* (USA/UK, Iain Softley), opens, unlike the 1902 Henry James novel on which it is based, with a scene set in the London Underground.[1] The dancing reflected lights of the titles resolve themselves into the headlights of a tube entering an underground station. Kate Croy (Helena Bonham Carter), wearing a large brimmed, becoming, hat, sits waiting for the train, which she then boards. The train is crowded, mainly but not exclusively with middle-class men, and Kate initially does not find a seat, strap-hanging as she gazes down the compartment. Her gaze meets that of the seated Merton Densher (Linus Roache), who rises from his seat, indicating with a meaningfully directed gaze that she should accept it. She moves down the carriage and brushes close to him as she accepts his seat, over which he stands (figures 1–3). Their proximity permits a comparison of their status. In addition to her grand hat trimmed spectacularly with blue ostrich feathers, she has a fur trimming to her costume and a silver fox around her neck. He wears a thin jacket, not a coat, and his shirt collar is a little threadbare. Because she is sitting and he is standing over her, his jacket flaps at the level of her face. With the very slightest of movements – slowly shutting her eyes – and facial expression, she seems almost to swoon into the flapping jacket.

In the next shot, she has left the train and walks along a crowded platform, looking back to him, who we see following, some way back. As she turns a corner to ascend the stairs, she looks back again, her face framed by the curve of the rounded tunnel.
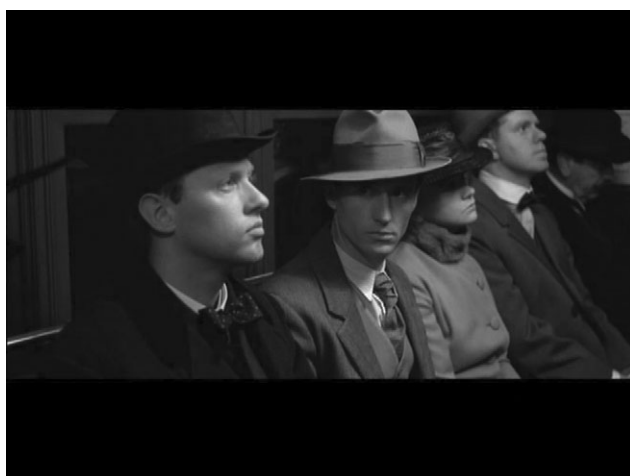
They mount the stairs in tiled underground corridors, and, against the stream of other passengers, find their way to an empty lift, which Merton – as far as we know, a stranger – closes. Here the punctuating device of a frontal shot of the two strangers standing in the lift is used, the doors in front of them reading 'Stand Clear of the Doors'. Until this point, the camera's viewpoint has been naturalistic, the camera too waiting for the train, in the carriage and back on the platform. Now its viewpoint is more obviously privileged, the lift rising through several floors to give an intermittent image of the couple in the lift, just like the strip of images on a piece of film. First they stand unmoving, then he takes off his hat, and then, when the next floor passes, we discover them kissing passionately (figures 4–6). He embraces her strongly and sexually, pulling her to him, his hand caressing her body: 'Kate'. She stops him with an abrupt, 'Merton, no'.

In this powerful, erotic opening to the film, the two central characters are, as we later learn, meeting each other for the first time after a period of enforced separation. The eroticism lies in the absolute contrast between the two modes of behaviour shown. The rigorous observance of the codes of silence on the tube followed by the wordless, passionate embrace in the temporarily private space of the lift is shocking in a way which is accentuated by the use of a period setting. At the same time, we are sufficiently familiar with wordless, frantic sex in the grinding lifts up to New York loft apartments in films like *Fatal Attraction* (Adrian Lyne, 1987) to believe in sex-in-lifts. The Victorian space left behind, still present in costume, reminds us constantly that they are behaving deeply scandalously in a private space that is really still a public space.

The film was shot at Shepperton Studios, where the train lines for this carefully researched opening scene were laid out in the car park.[2] On close – perhaps pedantic – examination, the scene has its own historical implausibilities. It is unlikely that Kate would have had to stand for long if gentlemen were sitting – she would not have needed to wait for Merton to give her a seat.[3] Then, as now, the chances of being in a lift alone were slight, and certainly managing to negotiate a lift without an operator whilst everyone else is being directed to a different lift is unlikely. These elements, though, are the very stuff of the encounter between Kate and Merton in which the private drama is played out in public. The accomplishment of the scene, the way in which we the audience are also rendered slightly breathless in the lift, lies in the shift in point of view. We are initially placed just as an observant fellow traveller, except that we see, through the camerawork and editing, the exchange of looks, the slight gesture of the offered seat, and Kate's almost imperceptible swoon into Merton's jacket. It is the last moment, above all, which is comprehensible only retrospectively. Only after our viewpoint is radically shifted to that of privileged voyeur through the lift grille do we reconsider the scene of the seat-giving. Kate and Merton may be breathing hard with passion – but for the audience, it is the revelation that they are not strangers at all which causes the gasp.
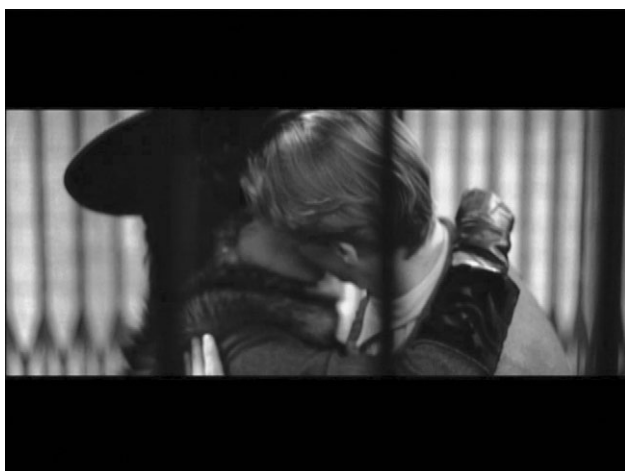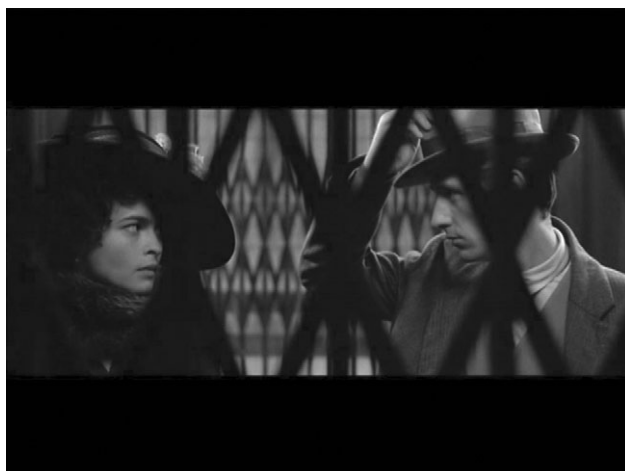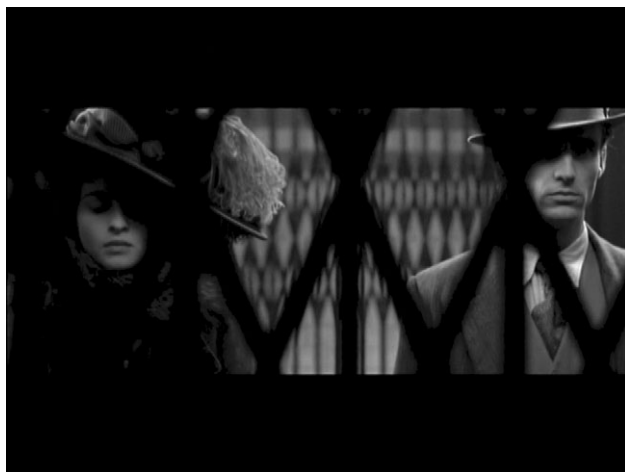
Figures 4–6
Kate Croy (Helena Bonham Carter)
and Merton Densher (Linus
Roache) in the lift. *The Wings of
the Dove* (Iain Softley, 1997).

The verisimilitude of the scene is sufficient – the 1910 train, the colouring and texture of the interior and the upholstery, the patterning and shade of the tiling, the proportions of the tunnels, passages and steps, the use of costume with its own class-specific nuances – to allow us to ask the more significant critical question, how does this scene work dramatically in relation to the rest of the film? What is gained by the Underground setting? We learn immediately about the material circumstances of the two central characters. We see, through the physical proximity of their costume and skin, that she is rich and he is poor. We also see that she is modern. She may be wealthy, but she is on the tube not in a carriage, and on the tube by herself. We also see that their relationship is one of sexual passion – she is modern in this sense too, despite being thoroughly encumbered by her costume. Through the masquerade of public and private that the scene enacts, we are also introduced to one of the central themes of the film, the gap between appearance and desire, and perhaps more specifically, the masking of desire in the public world. This is achieved more elegantly through an Underground setting than it would be in a more select semi-public setting, such as a ball or pleasure-garden, for Merton and Kate, initially introduced to the viewer as strangers, have, in these first moments, an equality as fellow travellers which they could not plausibly be shown to possess in a less functional setting.

This scene enacts many of the features that Wolfgang Schivelbusch has taught us to understand as historically specific in his study of the railway journey.[4] We see the close physical proximity of the passengers juxtaposed with the necessity of ignoring each other, and the use of reading newspapers as a way of dealing with this peculiar space. However, on the underground, there is of course, no external panorama at which to gaze. Space is not made panoramic, as Schivelbusch shows us with the train journey, but abolished, turned into time, the time it takes for the tube to pass through the dark tunnels to the illuminated, but spatially abstract, platforms of the stations. Narratively, this absence of panorama makes the space more immanent – space in which something is going to happen – and the patterning of movement and glances in this scene, which we can make sense of only retrospectively, *is* that happening.

Generically, though, the film is doing something else, and is offering us an unusual representation of the London Underground for the late twentieth century, for *The Wings of the Dove* is costume drama, and rather exquisitely costumed drama at that. The representational terrain of this genre is country houses, large estates, coaches and carriages and women in long dresses. It may extend to steam trains and chirpy cockneys, but does not generally include the Underground. The critic Nigel Floyd made the point economically when discussing this scene. Acknowledging its power, he said that nevertheless what had struck him most was Helena Bonham Carter's costume. We are, of course, accustomed to seeing her in Victorian and Edwardian costume, as a

4 Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *The Railway Journey* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1977).

5   Nigel Floyd, interviewed on *Back Row* BBC Radio 4, 14 March 2003.

stalwart of heritage cinema, but seeing her dressed like this on the tube, he found himself thinking 'Is the tube really that old? Has the London Underground been with us since the period when women wore full length dresses?'[5] Floyd's question points to the way in which the Underground, in this film, is, unusually, part of a coherent and integrated historical mise-en-scene. The Underground, in origin a Victorian space, is used here to signify the modernity of the young lovers in 1910 and their lack of access to any private space which would be sanctioned for their meeting. They have to make the public private because they have no permitted, shared, private space.

6   In the early part of the twentieth century, the London Underground did signify modernity, partly because of the promiscuous mixing of classes it permitted. The plot of *Underground* is structured through encounters on the tube. See Amy Sargeant, *British Cinema: A Critical History* (London: BFI, 2005), pp. 98–9 for a discussion of the film.

7   See Brunsdon, 'The elsewhere of the London Underground' in C. Berry *et al.* (eds) *Electronic Elsewheres* (Minnesota, MN: University of Minnesota Press, forthcoming) for a discussion of the London Underground as a space of shelter in the 1939–45 war.

Floyd's question about the age of the tube is an interesting one, though. It is both the modernity of the Underground in this 1990s film, and its integration into the historical setting of the narrative as a whole which is unusual.[6] More commonly, the space of the Underground in recent fiction film is very much less modern and the location for psychic or temporal disruption and horror, as we find in films such as Hammer's *Quatermass and the Pit* (Roy Ward Baker, 1967), Gary Sherman's *Deathline* (1972) and *An American Werewolf in London* (John Landis, 1979). Alongside this archaic cinematic Underground, there is also a documentary tradition which portrays the Underground as a contemporary place of labour in which, as in *The Wings of the Dove*, it can be a surprisingly private place. In this article I want to trace some of the different ways in which the London Underground has been figured in the cinema since the Second World War,[7] paying particular attention to the complex temporalities of the space and the way in which interiority, privacy and public life are articulated.

I have a dual motivation for this project. Firstly, it forms part of a larger work on London in the cinema. As I discuss below, the setting and iconography of the London Underground is an important element in the construction of cinematic London, and has a more varied history than might first be assumed. Secondly, in a way which is not specific to London, there is an interesting quality to the relationship between Underground space and cinematic space. Iain Softley, in the lift sequence in *The Wings of the Dove*, makes a vertical visual analogy between Kate and Merton's ascent in the lift and a strip of film. However, this analogy is also present horizontally in the alternation of the dark tunnels with the bright stations and the transformation of space into time. There is a sympathy, or resonance, between these temporal journeys in the dark which makes the Underground a seductive setting for the cinema[8] – perhaps sometimes too seductive, as Luc Besson observed wryly in discussing his use of the French métro in *Subway* (1985):

8   See Lynne Kirby for a discussion of early cinema and the railway journey. *Parallel Tracks: the Railroad and Silent Cinema* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997).

9   Luc Besson in *Film Francais*, no. 2029, March 1985, p. 8, quoted by David Berry in 'Underground cinema: French visions of the Métro', in Myrto Konstantarakos (ed.) *Spaces in European Cinema* (Exeter: Intellect, 2000), p. 21.

> j'avais une idée forte: le métro. Mais je n'arrivais pas à trouver une histoire aussi forte que ce décor. (I had a strong idea: the métro. But I couldn't find a story as strong as this setting.)[9]

What we might call the 'strong stories' of the Underground are mainly about time, but there is also, as I hope to show, a surprising persistence of

the relatively undiscussed aspect of the London Underground that we find in *Wings of the Dove*, its role as a paradoxically private space.

Lynda Nead, in her vivid account of the complex temporalities of Victorian London, pays particular attention to the role of railway-building in the transformation of the city.[10] Whilst she is concerned with both overground and underground railways, her discussion of the Metropolitan Underground Railway (the first line, which opened in 1863), is illuminating in relation to the representational space of London. She observes that, 'The building of the Metropolitan Underground Railway wrecked London' and continues:

> The construction of the Underground created visual spectacles that were unprecedented in the metropolis. The cross-section became a favourite technique for representing the railway system. In these images the full wonder of the Underground could be displayed; an apparently normal street above the ground and then, below the gas pipes and sewers, another, parallel world of passengers, locomotives and airy tunnels illuminated by gas. The tunnelling itself summoned images of the sublime, with excavations on an apparently limitless scale and tiny figures dwarfed by massive building works. This was a new urban aesthetic built around the forms of the tunnel, the trench, the vault and scaffolding.[11]

Nead's point about the new urban aesthetic 'built around the forms of the tunnel, the trench, the vault and scaffolding' is that it is an aesthetic of modernity, but one which is built upon ruin. The cross-section, in which the revelation of the engineered underground could be displayed, is dependent on the prior ravishing of the surface city. The subsequent representation and deployment of the Underground in the cinema raises both different and related issues. Once built, the Underground is no longer amenable to representation as a cross-section. Instead, a much more clearly Gothic topography becomes characteristic, and it is most frequently within the horror genre that we find the Underground in British cinema discussed.[12] Within this tradition, the tunnels of the Underground are not modern, as in *The Wings of the Dove* or Nead's account, but in some sense archaic. Thus we return to the complex temporalities of the Underground as a space and the way in which, as David Pike suggests, different times characteristically co-exist therein.[13]

Cinematically, the co-existence of different times is constitutive of what, following Besson, we might call the two 'strong stories' of the underground, both of which involve time play. One, which I will discuss below in both feature and documentary versions, is a story about something forgotten, repressed or unknown emerging from the dark tunnels underground. The second, often rather literal, and perhaps sometimes overly seductive for the film-maker, is a set of urban narratives structured through the 'too late' of closing doors, ticket barriers and just-missed trains. Cities worldwide have underground transport systems, and their use as cinematic locations provides both

10 Lynda Nead, *Victorian Babylon: People, Streets and Images in Nineteenth Century London* (New Haven, CT and London: Yale University Press, 2000), part one, 'Mapping and movement'.

11 Ibid., p. 39.

12 Nick Freeman, 'London kills me: the English metropolis in British horror films of the 1970s', in Xavier Mendik (ed.) *Shocking Cinema of the Seventies* (Hereford: Noir Publishing, 2002), pp. 193–210. Marcelle Perks, 'A descent into the underworld: *Deathline*' in Steve Chibnall and Julian Petley (eds), *British Horror Cinema* (London: Routledge, 2002), pp. 145–55.

13 David Pike 'Modernist space and the transformation of underground London' in Pamela K. Gilbert, (ed.), *Imagined Londons* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2002).

local specificity and an easy and plausible setting for chance encounters, pursuits and chases. Many a villain or intended victim in films set all over the world has tried to escape by running through subways and up and down stairs, endeavouring to leap on a train just before the doors close, from Regina Lambert (Audrey Hepburn) in Paris in *Charade* (Stanley Donen, 1966) to Spiderman in Manhattan in *Spiderman II* (Sam Raimi, 2004). Romances and romantic encounters too are enabled and impeded by just catching or just missing trains, as in the 1998 London-set *Sliding Doors* (Peter Howitt), which used the device of 'the train not taken' to elaborate a double 'what if' time scheme for the whole film.[14]

Rather than survey just-missed and just-caught underground trains in the cinema, I want to look in some detail at two contrasted British films of the mid 1960s which feature the London Underground. The first, *Quatermass and the Pit* (Roy Ward Baker, 1967), is an example not of the chase, but of the other type of 'strong story', in which the underground reveals something of what lurks in its depths. This colour feature film from one of the most distinctive British studios opens with a group of workmen labouring at a major excavation in a fictional London Underground station. The second film, *The Irishmen* (Phillip Donnellan, 1965), made for the BBC, is a black and white documentary which includes footage of Irish labourers working on the tunnels of the Victoria Line. In each film, the Underground proves to be a complex temporal space, whilst in *The Irishmen* it is constructed as a more subjective and private space than might be generically anticipated. I conclude with a discussion of another group of Underground workers who can be spotted in a range of films made since World War II.

Quatermass and the Pit is the third of the Hammer films based on the BBC *Quatermass* serials and was scripted by Nigel Kneale.[15] As the particular horror unearthed in the pit of the Underground excavation is a Martian space ship, generically the film is most properly seen as science-fiction, and is discussed as such by Peter Hutchings, in his essay, 'We're the Martians now'.[16] However, the topography of the film is Gothic, and the aliens are Martians five million years old. The film, set in the present day, is located in and around a fictional London Underground station, Hobbs End. Hobbs End station is introduced in the opening sequence as a police constable, on his night rounds, pauses to investigate the partially

14 For a broader discussion of the film's use of London, see Ewa Mazierska and Laura Rascaroli, *From Moscow to Madrid: Postmodern Cities, European Cinema* (London: I.B.Tauris, 2003), ch. 8.

15 The 1959 BBC serial (written by Nigel Kneale, who also wrote the screenplay for Hammer), which opens on the street sign for Hobbs Lane, with the earlier, differently spelt sign visible underneath, does not use an Underground setting. The excavation is instead of the Baldoon House development in Knightsbridge.

16 Peter Hutchings, 'We're the Martians now', in I.Q.Hunter, *British Science Fiction Cinema* (London: Routledge, 1999).

Figures 7 and 8
The gate ajar. ***Quatermass and the Pit*** **(Roy Ward Baker, 1967).**

open station gates, reading a London Transport notice about the regretted inconvenience caused by the current extension to the Central Line (figures 7 and 8). The unclosed gate – a Pantograph grille not fully expanded – detains this guardian of order for a moment or two, and introduces the next scene for the viewers, when, with a sharp cut, we descend into the tube station to see the work that is being undertaken on the extension. However, this shot of the three-quarters-closed Pantograph gate to the Underground, very early in the film, also condenses what will become its key narrative, the wilful human disturbance of the boundary between the overground and the underground.

The second scene in the film shows the labouring navvies excavating the tunnel extension. Their labour is shown to be hard and heavy, hewing out with pick-axes great chunks of rock and clay which are then carried away from the excavation on a motorized belt. There are clear affinities here with the representational terrain of the *The Irishmen*, which I discuss below, and indeed the name of the Irish construction firm, Balfour Beatty, is discernible on the sides of the conveyor belt being used in Hobbs End tube station. However, although the referent – the tunnel-digging labour – may be the same, the construction of narrative space is quite different. In *Quatermass and the Pit* the construction of the underground set is dominated by the necessity for it to be clear, narratively, where people are. This means that the set is also rather abbreviated because it needs to contain both the relative safety of the station platform and the excavation site which eventually becomes filled with the mystery space ship. *Quatermass and the Pit* is an instructive example of the aesthetic of the underground as a Gothic place in that it displays the two key structuring oppositions of this aesthetic within seconds of its beginning: the overground/underground opposition and that between the platform and the tunnels. As is generically predictable, we do not spend long with the workers digging the extension before one of the lumps of rubble sent up the moving belt turns out to be something horrible – in this case, a skull, which is then followed by more skeletal remains. The workmen find these tokens of 'what lies beneath', and are shown, in different ways, to be strongly affected by them, but the explanation of their finds is entrusted to others.

Throughout the film, what is found in the excavation at Hobbs End is subject to competing explanations, each associated with key characters. A palaeontologist, Dr Roney (James Donald), is at first convinced that the skull is 'pre-pre-historic'; his assistant, Miss Judd (Barbara Shelley), recruits Professor Quatermass (Andrew Keir) to her investigation of a history of trouble, horror and apparition at the site, seemingly connected to 'the disturbance of the earth' through activities such as tree-felling and well-boring; the Army are convinced that it is German military propaganda from the last war. The older, folk knowledge investigated by Professor Quatermass and Miss Judd is the most resonant, but does not fully explain what is found in the tunnel. What first seems to be an unexploded bomb is excavated to reveal a futuristic spaceship-type pod

which is made of a substance unknown to man and contains a hidden compartment. This vehicle embodies the generic hybridity of the film – buried deep below ground, it nevertheless seems to have come from outer space. The horror of the film lies in the eruption of an archaic future – the awakening of a former invasion from Mars – and it is the disturbance of the earth in the proposed extension of the Underground which excites these hidden temporalities.

In a metonymic scene which condenses the spatial relations of the film, the space pod is revealed to be a bad and powerful place when entered after hours by a workman returning to collect his tools. The workman, who had previously been employed to (unsuccessfully) drill through the impregnable secret compartment, has been shown to be a cheery, competent fellow who boasts how much better he feels knowing that he has insurance. In his second scene he enters the deserted station insouciantly, joking, as the lights go out, 'Where was Moses when the lights went out?' and answering himself, 'In the dark'. He tries drilling again inside the pod but it seems to become sentient and angry, shaking and rumbling. The workman, his tools and other bits of equipment inside the pod are tossed around, looking partly as if they are in the gravity-less atmosphere of outer space. He part flies, part tumbles, is part tossed out of the pod, and, with other debris, is swept up onto the platform – just as rubbish can be by an approaching train. He is thrown out of the station gates, past the waiting watchman and Miss Judd and is accompanied by exactly the sort of animated litter that flaps against tube station gates. The empirical detail of his possession is precisely the detritus of everyday tube travel: great gusts of litter made animate by approaching trains.

Possessed, or, as Professor Quatermass theorizes, with an archaic part of himself re-awakened, the workman crashes into a tea kiosk. Bad space has emerged from the Underground somehow in his body, and as soon as he touches the stall, cups and plates are swept off their hooks and shelves. It is both hurricane and a very contemporary imagery of gravity-less movement. He is swept on to a church yard, grabbing at gravestones and finally coming to rest on asphalt. However, the disturbance in the Underground has abolished the distinction between above and below ground and the very ground on which he is lying begins to ripple.

Peter Hutchings, who discusses *Quatermass and the Pit* in the context of 1950s and 1960s invasion fantasies in film and television, points out that this 1967 film is 'something of an anachronism'[17] when compared with both the earlier BBC Quatermass serials and Hammer films. 'Quatermass's Britain is visibly weak and vulnerable, caught as it is in a kind of collective post-war doze'.[18] The film does, however, offer three interesting 1960s contemporary referents in addition to the references to space travel. The first is the significant, 1960s presentation of the female lead, Miss Judd (Barbara Shelley), who, while she still wears gloves with her short-skirted Chanel-style pink suit, also wears smart, fashionable boots and a cape. Miss Judd, although always an

17 Ibid., p. 46.

18 Ibid., p. 41.

assistant, is evidently extremely competent and can be relied on not to succumb to horror or fear at the discoveries made in the pit (although she does prove particularly sensitive to Martian life). In many ways she takes the interpretative initiative as it is she who mediates between Roney and Quatermass in researching the history of the area. She is very much a modern, mobile 1960s woman, both in this mediation, and in the way in which she races about the set. The second 1960s referent, rather literally, is the relevance of London Underground expansion, as this film was made during the excavation and building of the first post-war tube line, the Victoria line.[19] The third contemporary referent, which is much more developed in the earlier BBC version, and here persists only in a residual manner, is the oblique address to Commonwealth immigration in the inclusion of a black workman in the labourers' team.[20] In the Hammer version, in the film's climax, some humans attempt to kill others 'just because they are different'. In the television version, made shortly after the Notting Hill 'race riots' of 1958 there is explicit reference to a 'race war' between Martians and humans and a rather more explicit analogy. Thus the film's narrative space and time is complex, combining as it does the vocabularies of alien invasion and gravity-less space travel with modern young women, architectural finds, a changing London and the drilling and boring of the expanding space of the Underground. Excavating the Underground does not just send workmen mad. It muddles time, producing a space which is past and future, contemporary and archaic.

While films such as *Quatermass and the Pit*, *Deathline* or the later *An American Werewolf in London* show or refer to labour in the Underground, they do so generally within an aesthetic informed by key oppositions between the surface and the underground, and, symmetrically, once underground, between the safe, illuminated platforms and the dark gaping tunnels. One of the narrative tensions in *Quatermass* is the question of whether it is safe to go down to the excavation and whether the public can be allowed in. The most dangerous activity in *Deathline* is standing on the edge of the station platform and peering into the tunnel. The horror genre does penetrate the tunnels, but only to discover horror. In *Deathline* we do enter the dark, dank lair, decorated with suspended human limbs, where the last survivors of a nineteenth century engineering accident have lived, just as, in *Quatermass*, people who return to the spaceship in the tunnel become possessed. In documentary, the tunnels are treated differently, not as places of horror, but as places of labour. I want to discuss this in relation to a 1965 film, *The Irishmen* (produced and directed by Philip Donnellan, shot by Michael Williams), made during the building of the Victoria Line, and in relation to a group of workers known as 'fluffers' who appear in glimpses in several documentaries about underground London.

The Irishmen is about the lives of the Irish emigrants who came over to Britain to work as labourers after World War II. It is one of a group of films Donnellan made in the 1960s on aspects of contemporary life, the best known of which is *The Colony* (1964) about Birmingham. *The*

21 Lance Pettitt discusses the film at more length in *Screening Ireland: Film and Television Representation* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), pp. 85–8.

Irishmen was made in 1965 for the BBC, although it was never shown.[21] The immigrants are shown working on two major projects, one of which is the motorways and the other the Victoria line, London's first post-war tube line. Both were built using a labour contract system called the Lump, which is non-unionized casual labour. The film starts with men waiting to be picked up for jobs in Camden Town, and then interweaves work and leisure sequences, with one of its concerns being to show the relative isolation of the labourers outside their work companionship. The canteen-like bar on site in which they are shown to drink after work in one scene is thus contrasted with the family life left behind in Ireland, while at the same time, the inevitability of exile for the young is set up early on, with a young man, whose journey we follow, musing, 'What's it to be, England or America?'

The film has several simultaneous temporal structures: the working day (finishing with a drink), the working week (including hurley at Wembley on a Saturday), generational migration from Ireland to England and the particular journey of this one young man who arrives at a London terminal as the film finishes. The four-and-a-half-minute sequence I want to analyse juxtaposes the young man's ferry trip across the Irish Sea with the labour of tunnelling under London. As with much of the film, Donnellan and Charles Parker (the radio producer, credited as tape editor) use song as soundtrack. In this sequence, the song is not diegetic, but is used to structure both space and exposition. The fiddle music begins as the traveller is shown on the deck of the ferry with the seagulls circling. This is the song of the 'London Clay', a traditional melody arranged by Ewan McColl and Peggy Seeger, which has lyrics which counterpose the beauty and freedom of country rhythms in Ireland, the trout, the salmon and the wild geese, with the team commands of the labourers, 'Up with the shield, jack it, ram it, driving a tunnel through the London clay'.[22]

22 The songs are credited to MacColl and Seeger as 'songs to traditional Irish melodies'. The credited singers are Paul Lennihan and Joe Heaney, although many individuals are featured singing diegetically. Other non-diegetic songs used include 'The Rambler from Clare' and 'Jack of all Trades', both of which share precise reference to the different parts of Ireland which might have been home to the singers or the audience.

The juxtaposition is one of loss, the loss of the life of the countryman: the hares run free and the curragh rots because no-one is there to trap and fish, to live off the land, because the men have gone to London. The song is precise in its invocation of both the plenitude of the Irish country and the locations from which the emigrants leave – Connemara, the Wicklow mountains, Armagh – offering possibilities of identification for any migrant listener and creating an elegiac narrative space to which the first two minutes of the sequence are cut. The montage juxtaposes the emigrant on the boat with increasing flashes of tunnel labour contrasted with seagulls, mountains, fishing boats and an abandoned curragh. Whilst it is the space of the man's journey, it is more significantly a space of exilic consciousness; the labour of the tunnelling overwhelming rural origins, while the flight of the wild geese is recalled while underground. The song is absent for the second part of the sequence, which is all underground with the harsh diegetic sound of tunnelling. The cramped, quick shots to which we have been introduced earlier are now sustained in a way that emphasizes the constriction and heat and dirt of the labour.

We see a section of tunnel roof being installed, the men working alongside the mighty shield, their sweaty skin and the whites of their eyes the lightest part of the image. The melody returns more urgently as the sequence concludes with the spoil being carried out of the excavation on a conveyor belt, and now that we understand the labour that awaits our traveller, we return to the ferry.

So what does this sequence of film document? It shows us something of the building of the Victoria Line, that it was built by Irish immigrants, and how very hard this was, both physically and psychically. The cutting of the sequence, partly to the song, allows us to apprehend the rhythms of repetitive labour. This is combined with quite detailed documentary footage of tunnelling, of the underground as a place of work, which is woven into an evocation of consciousness. Thus we have both a strong sense of physical labour and of the memories and desires – and home – of the workers. This is clearly an example of the exilic consciousness which Hamid Naficy[23] has shown has its own internal elsewhere, but it is also an instance of the way in which the very cramped nature of the dark tunnels of the Underground, even as they are being built, offers a strange privacy.[24] Just as Kate and Merton found, in the Underground, somewhere to embrace, Donnellan chooses to use the Underground sequence to evoke the exilic yearning of individual labourers.

Donnellan's concern in *The Irishmen* is not with the Underground as such, although the building of the Victoria line does provide the film with its most memorable imagery, and he uses the visual contrast between the dark tunnels, the sea and deserted rural Ireland to evoke the felt meaning of exile. His skill as a documentarist lies in the way in which he combines film footage, recorded speech, sound and song to reveal not only what the work and the life was like, but what it felt like. In this, he makes an unusual representation of manual labour entailing feelings as well as strength. I have argued that this is partly achieved because, perhaps surprisingly, underground spaces can be particularly amenable to the project of suggesting interiority. More commonly, the London Underground features in documentary film in two formats, the 'London under London', in which the Underground is featured alongside underground sites such as sewers, government bunkers, wine cellars and silver vaults, and 'London at Night', in which the focus is on the work conducted by postmen, underground cleaners and musicians while the city sleeps.

The world of each type of film is a man's world – only men are found working and it is men who act as guides to the documentarists – with two exceptions. Women working as prostitutes figure briefly – but repeatedly – sometimes just through shots of a swishing skirt above some idling high-heeled feet. Claude Goretta and Alain Tanner's 1957 short film about a night out in London, *Nice Time*, concludes with the key tropes of the 'London at Night' group of films: the tube closing down, the barrow boys wheeling away their barrows and only the police, some sailors and 'the ladies of the night' left in Piccadilly Circus. Donovan

23 Hamid Naficy, *An Accented Cinema* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001).

24 Marc Augé's, *In the Métro,* trans. Tom Conley (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2002 [1986]) discusses the psychic space of the metro.

Winter's *The Awakening Hour* (1957) also features a prostitute and then porters in Covent Garden as typical workers of the night. *City After Dark* (1955) has a two-shot prostitute sequence, the first shot of a high-heeled woman, standing against a shop window, tapping her foot, framed from just below her shoulders, the second of a man's legs and feet apparently approaching her. However, there is also another group of women who can be found in several post-war underground documentaries, and they too have a curiously transgressive presence.

Fluffers were maintenance workers who cleaned the tube lines during its night-time closures, and can be found in films of each type. Organized, like most maintenance workers, in gangs, the fluffers used knives, dusters, brushes and any other suitable implements to clean, particularly, the rails and the 'chairs' in which they are set, of dust, human hair, rat excrement and other litter. *Under Night Streets* (1958), a twenty minute British Transport Film which has been selected by London's Transport Museum as one of the films available to the public on its web site, concentrates on showing the myriad safety activities going on in the Underground 'while you're pressing the mattress' (figures 9–12).[25] Workers are shown climbing and cleaning the ventilator shafts under a deserted Piccadilly Circus station, and then the 'big gang boys' undress on the platform to go down into the tunnel. The camera then switches to a group of women in overalls on the platform, and introduces them saying, 'Fluffers, that's what they're called. They're VIPs, they are, for this is fire prevention work' as the women move down into the tunnels to start work. There is a hint here, in both the tone and vocabulary of this introduction, of a difficulty about the status of, and attitudes to, the fluffers.[26] When the women are shown working in the tunnels, in the next scene, they are represented in the tradition of the representation of working class women doing manual jobs as jolly, cheeky and potentially bawdy. This is achieved through the interaction between the working women and their foreman/boss, who rides past them on a strange tricycle-like vehicle adapted to run along the train rails. As he glides past the women who are brushing and scraping, he greets them familiarly and they quip back. The introduction, though, tries to set up the fluffers slightly differently. Referring to the women as 'VIPs', and specifying that their labour is 'fire-prevention work' (which it undoubtedly is) insists on both the status and the significance of the labour in a way which amounts to a disavowal. The tone of the narrator argues against dismissing the women as insignificant, but to call them VIPs inscribes within the narration the very opposite: that these were extremely poorly paid women, working night shifts in filthy and dangerous conditions, who presumably only took the work because they also had households and families to run – and possibly day jobs.

The fluffers also appear in *City After Dark* (Ian K. Barnes, 1955), a nineteen minute film which deals with 'another world' that lies 'beneath the quiet paving stones of the city'. Once again starting with Piccadilly Circus, this film shows night life closing down and then goes

25 Directed by Ralph Keene, produced by Edgar Anstey for British Transport Films. The film was given a theatrical release in the West End in 1958, and the *London Transport Magazine* publicised it as 'A Film You Should See', observing 'The content of facts and figures has been judged well. Not too much to overwhelm the general cinema-goer, but sufficient to hold the interest of the transport man himself.' *London Transport Magazine*, vol. 12, no. 5 (1958), p. 16.

26 This difficulty of tone is also apparent in Trench and Hillman's classic study where they refer to 'that esoteric body of workers in the Underground: the fluffers. The fluffers are a small group of stalwart ladies who work in the tunnels in the small hours . . .' Trench and Hillman, *The London Under London*, p. 130. See also Stephen Smith, *Underground London* (London: Little Brown, 2004), p. 274.

underground to reveal the labour of the sewage workers, underground maintenance, post-office sorters and the BBC. This film is keen to stress the precision of the timing and execution of underground maintenance work, showing the last Bakerloo tube leaving Piccadilly Circus and observing:

> A dead city needs no transport. The time is 1.32 am. But by 1.52 am, the night gangs have taken over. Every foot of every mile must be checked. The tubes never rest. Every night when the last train has passed, the ghostly tunnels witness men, and women too, checking, cleaning, tightening . . .

'And women too' recognizes that the employment of women in this type of work may surprise an audience, just as 'the ghostly tunnels' suggests that a Gothic topography haunts documentary as much as fiction film. The women are shown wearing dark overalls with their hair tied up in pale headscarves. With their sleeves rolled up to show bare arms, the women also wear earrings visible under their headscarves. Holding lamps, they wield a variety of implements to scrape and brush the line.

This film then gives us a very unusual representation of the Underground through camera placement and movement. A shot of the women working in the dark of the tunnels, the only lighting visible their individually held lamps, transforms into a very eerie view of the platform as the camera, without a cut, pans right, away from the fluffers and up to the brightly lit, deserted station platform. The shot becomes eerie because of the revelation of concealed space and depth. While we are with the fluffers in the tunnel, the camera is appropriately placed to allow us to observe their work. Only with the pan and tilt is the height of the

platform – and our own lowly position – revealed. While in horror films, the horror lurks in the tunnels, in this documentary it is the light, bright, deserted and elevated platform which seems uncanny.

The fluffers transform underground space again in Molly Dineen's 1989 television documentary, *The Heart of the Angel*, which was made at the Islington tube station, Angel, before it was redeveloped.[27] The Angel is the deepest station on the London Underground, and was built with the two lines running on either side of a central platform island, rather than in separate tunnels, which means that the underground part of the station is a unified space. The film follows a fairly standard 'day in the life' structure, with a central fourteen minutes concerned with the invisible, underground, night-time work. It is a poignant portrait of an enclosed world, the first outside shot occurring nineteen minutes in. The workers at the station are demoralized by their deteriorating working conditions and the film opens with the clearly regular failure of the lifts and the streams of commuters labouring their way up the long stairs. The staff's inability to give the travelling public a satisfactory service is just one element in their low-grade dissatisfaction and dreams of elsewhere. These are differently expressed by different workers, from the hard-line 'I hate work' of the man in the ticket shop, to the lift operator who would rather try farming, to the man who would rather return to Yorkshire and observes that 'It's not the same London'. The topography of the film emphasizes the vertical-ness of life in the station, the same faces going up and down, with nothing of the Islington outside. However, there is a horizontal dimension to space, but only deep underground. The linesmen appear on the platform from the tunnels and Dineen asks, 'How far have you just walked?' 'From Camden Town', comes the reply, and they are going on to Bank. Yet it is once again the fluffers whose use of space is most transformative. Unlike the 1950s representations of these workers, where we see them already in the overalls and ready to work, here Dineen films the women as they prepare for work, and interviews them directly. What we learn poses the question of where the women in *Under Night Streets* or *City After Dark* changed – and suggests one of the sources of the awkwardness of tone in which these workers are discussed – for in *Heart of the Angel*, in 1989, the women change on the platform. Indeed, we first see the fluffers as they start to change on the deserted station platforms, stripping to their underwear to put on their overalls, using the benches daily sat on by commuters to store their clothes. In an extraordinary reversal of the public and private space staged in *The Wings of the Dove* with which we started, here the wooden benches polished and worn by millions of commuting bottoms are used like bedroom chairs or dressing-table stools. The empty public space of the station is rendered both intimate and unfamiliar. Their clothes neatly folded on the benches, the women climb down onto the tracks and enter the tunnels with their dusters and scrapers.

It is clearly still a filthy job – possibly filthier in 1989 than it was in 1958 – and there is still something that is both incongruous and shocking

28 Stephen Halliday *Underground to Everywhere* (Stroud: Sutton Publishing, 2003) suggests that the fluffers were mainly replaced in the 1970s by the 'big yellow duster', a five car cleaning train (p. 195). Clearly not at the Angel. London Transport records on this group of workers appear almost non-existent.

about the labour of these women in the tunnels, on foot, performing a hidden, public housework.[28] That is perhaps the scandal, for the work has all the attributes of housework: invisible, repetitive, directed at maintenance not production, dealing with the detritus of everyday lives – and is, like housework, unrecognized. Yet it is also conducted in the middle of the night in dark tunnels, with women working in gangs, and both maintains and makes strange the spaces of the London Underground.

These documentary films, revealing the hidden labour which has built and maintains the London Underground, provide a kind of negative of the 'strong story' of what lurks in the tunnel. It is not horror, or monsters, but labour, which is realized very precisely through the way in which underground space is rendered in these films. *Deathline* recognizes this relationship, for the cannibals who haunt the tunnels are the descendants of nineteenth-century labourers, abandoned by the entrepreneurs financing the building of the Underground after a fatal accident, but I suggest that the spaces and labour of the fluffers are perhaps stranger because they are less generically familiar.

So the cinematic space of the London Underground is both a surprisingly bodily space and also a space to which the lack of an outside or a view lends a curious privacy. It is an internationally recognizable national space which signifies London, but also an international narrative space which prefers certain kinds of stories about the forgotten, the repressed, and about pursuit and chases. It is a space which is constantly made and remade in different times, and stories, and films. If the strong stories of the Underground are all about time, and space transformed into time, just like the cinema, we can also find there surprising intimacies.

cover illustration
Helena Bonham Carter in *The Wings of the Dove* (Iain Softley, 1997)

Correction: In Catherine Flower, 'Room for experiment: gallery films and vertical time from Maya Deren to Eija Liisa Ahtila', *Screen* vol. 45, no. 4 (2004), Maya Deren's film *Meshes of the Afternoon* was incorrectly titled throughout. We apologise for this error.

The art film, affect and the female viewer: *The Piano* revisited

BARBARA KLINGER

1 Sue Gillett, 'Lips and fingers: Jane Campion's *The Piano*', *Screen*, vol. 36, no. 3 (1995), p. 286. See also Gillett's *Views from Beyond the Mirror: The Films of Jane Campion* (St Kilda, Australia: Australian Teachers of Media, 2004), where she continues to develop the importance of the personal to textual reading and response.

2 Laleen Jayamanne, *Toward Cinema and its Double: Cross-Cultural Mimesis* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2001), p. 48.

3 For more commentary from female critics on *The Piano* when it first appeared, see: Stella Bruzzi, 'Tempestuous petticoats: costume and desire in *The Piano*', *Screen*, vol. 36, no. 3 (1995), pp. 257–66; and Lynda Dyson, 'The return of the repressed? Whiteness, femininity, and colonialism in *The Piano*', *Screen*, vol. 36, no. 3 (1995), pp. 267–76. See also Suzy Gordon, ' 'I clipped your wing, that's all': auto-eroticism and the female spectator in *The Piano* debate', *Screen*, vol. 37, no. 2 (1996), pp. 193–205. Such work as Gillett's *Views from Beyond the Mirror* and Vivian Sobchack's

Every so often a film appears that has the ability to mesmerize its spectators, taking up sustained residence in their imaginations and emotions. A dozen years ago that film, at least for some female viewers, was Jane Campion's *The Piano* (1993). In her 1995 essay in *Screen*, Sue Gillett testified to the film's strange magic when she wrote that, '*The Piano* affected me very deeply. I was entranced, moved, dazed. I held my breath. I was reluctant to re-enter the everyday world after the film had finished. *The Piano* shook, disturbed, and inhabited me. I felt that my own dreams had taken form, been revealed. I dreamed of Ada the night after I saw the film. These were thick, heavy and exhilarating feelings'.[1] In a more material instance of the film's affective impact, Laleen Jayamanne reported that, to her astonishment, she acquired an inexplicable pain in a finger of her left hand in apparent sympathy with the suffering caused Ada, the film's protagonist, when her index finger is severed by her axe-wielding husband in a fit of rage.[2] Although there are undoubtedly viewers who were unmoved by *The Piano*, like Gillette and Jayamanne, others have found the film visually ravishing, provocatively perplexing and otherwise compelling.[3]

The film's public heyday is over, but far from losing its purchase on viewers, *The Piano* lives on through video and DVD reissue. The passage of time and repeated viewing may dispel a film's interest for fans, but multiple returns to a favourite text can also enhance its original effects, enabling spectators to meditate further on its allure, as well as their own responses. Indeed, such returns are often strongly motivated by a desire to recapture and to understand the emotions the film initially elicited.

Carnal Thoughts: Embodiment and Moving Image Culture (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2004), pp. 53–84 provide examples of the film's continuing ability to produce testimonials and provoke debate.

4 Charles Affron analyses art films and other genres to understand how emotion is aroused in Cinema and Sentiment (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1982). He notes that art films engage in an overt sentimentality usually associated with Hollywood films, including 'tear-jerkers', thus indicating the proximity between art and Hollywood cinema in this regard.

5 Work on art cinema and the institution of reviewing includes Janet Staiger, Interpreting Films: Studies in the Historical Reception of American Cinema (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992) and Mike Budd, 'The moments of Caligari', in Mike Budd (ed.), The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari: Texts, Contexts, Histories (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1990), pp. 7–119.

6 Joan Hawkins', Cutting Edge: Art-Horror and the Horrific Avant-Garde (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), a study of the interrelationships between horror films and art cinema, shows the difficulty of maintaining traditional distinctions between low and high culture in cinema, distinctions often erroneously sustained through assumptions that low culture delivers affect viscerally, while high culture invokes a more distanced and refined response.

With the durability of a film's impact in mind, I argue that the fascination The Piano has exercised for viewers is suggestive for a study of the art film's affective dimensions. Like more mainstream fare, art cinema is clearly capable of arousing strong emotions.[4] Yet the genre has attracted little attention in reception or audience studies, save for periodic analyses of film reviews that examine how international films are received in US markets.[5] Scholars interested in audiences have been drawn instead to popular cultural texts, especially Hollywood films and television series. Such texts leave large discursive footprints in their wake, resulting in bountiful commentary to examine. Further, a blockbuster such as Titanic (James Cameron, 1997) or a cult phenomenon such as the Star Trek franchise plays a role in fans' everyday lives, giving these texts a prominent place in cultural experience that justifies their importance for study. Since the art film often circulates in marginal exhibition venues and attracts a relatively small viewership, it lacks the mainstream text's cultural currency. Moreover, the niche group most often associated with the art film – the educated elite – has rarely been of interest to theorists and critics focused on redeeming the mass cultural viewer from the spectre of the Frankfurt School's undifferentiated, passive consumer. At the same time, as art film critics concentrate on defining the historical contexts, directors and aesthetic strategies involved in specific films or film movements, spectatorship is often at best a secondary consideration.

Because of the tacit assumption that the genre's textual complexities, coupled with its constrained cultural circulation and elite audience, circumscribe questions of response, the art film viewer has fallen between the cracks of film scholarship. We can begin to reconsider this state of affairs by acknowledging that art films and their spectators are not somehow isolated from the hubbub of mass culture. Art cinema is seldom free from affiliations with more popular genres, as the French New Wave or New German Cinema movements, with their ambivalent relation to Hollywood films, attest.[6] The Piano itself is a hybrid – part art film, part Gothic melodrama. Further, although art films and their discursive environments may cultivate certain kinds of responses and attract educated audiences, the individual viewer is a reservoir of past textual encounters that cut across aesthetic boundaries, any of which can be activated in the process of viewing. It is unlikely, then, that responses to art films line up neatly according to the customary divide between high and low culture, between modernist and popular texts. The question of the art film viewer's response thus involves reckoning both with the intertextual, boundary-crossing nature of films in the genre and the viewing modalities that encounter them.

Rather than mount a full-scale interpretation of the Campion film to reflect upon its hold over viewers, I address one of the major currencies of the art film in general and The Piano in particular: the spectacular, enigmatic and captivating image. Surely the heated responses The Piano has elicited are linked to the noted evocativeness of Campion's imagery?

7 Roland Barthes, *Image, Music, Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (New York, NY: Hill and Wang, 1977), pp. 52–68.

8 Robert Ray, 'Scenes as clues', (anthology prospectus, unpublished manuscript). My study is inspired by Ray's deployment of Roland Barthes and other theorists to argue for an interpretive mode that analyses movie experiences by exploring the meaning of elusive and compelling cinematic details. For more on this, see Ray's *How a Film Theory Got Lost and Other Mysteries in Cultural Studies* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2001), especially pp. 1–14.

9 Annette Kuhn, *Family Secrets: Acts of Memory and Imagination* (New York, NY: Verso, 1995), pp. 28, 39. See also her *Dreaming of Fred and Ginger: Cinema and Cultural Memory* (New York, NY: New York University Press, 2002). As my article was going through final revisions, I was also made aware of a relevant source by a different author – Victor Burgin's *The Remembered Film* (London: Reaktion Books, 2004). Burgin discusses the significance of the film fragment and involuntary associations – including personal memory, dreams and connections with other films – to the contemporary study of cinema, especially given the impact of video and other similar developments on film viewing.

I wish to focus on the evocative image as a site of lingering affective power and uncertain meaning. If, as Godard suggests of all cinema (in his eight-part series *Histoire(s) du Cinema* [1988–1998]), we do not remember story details as much as certain scenes and objects, then we might explore in detail the role that memorable cinematic fragments play in reception – especially in films defined extensively by the strength, as well as the ambiguity, of their images. Granting that there is something elusive about the images viewers find most compelling – in Roland Barthes' formulation, a 'third meaning' that resonates with an excess of signification – the art film allows us to investigate the imagistic basis of film response and recollection in a genre known for its ability to conjure memorable visuals.[7]

As Robert Ray argues, a study of film that does not 'mobilize cinematic details as *evidence* of larger arguments', but regards 'movie scenes as *clues* to unpredictable knowledge', invites interpretations based less on the certainties of traditional exegesis and more on tracing the associations provoked by the cinematic moments that haunt us.[8] Studying the associative dimensions of viewing provides an alternative means of comprehending the film experience. Along these lines, scholars such as Annette Kuhn have discussed the importance of association, emotion and memory to the ways in which viewers process films, insisting that cinema has a profound sensory dimension that stirs recollections of other events, other selves, even of other films. Kuhn has called for cultural theory to include the viewer's experience – not as a 'trump card of authenticity', but to recognize the place of experience in film analysis and its vital connection to 'wider, more public, histories'.[9] If we acknowledge that any individual response is a composite of intertextual and social dynamics, analysing the personal becomes a matter of tracking the cultural forces at work in the encounter between film and viewer.

Foregrounding the primacy of the inscrutable visual and the inevitable associative processes at work in reception, I examine *The Piano*'s closing scene, in which Ada imagines herself moored to her piano at the bottom of the sea. By reflecting on this scene, I hope to explore the relationship between cinematic visuals and affective responses negotiated through the viewer's past experiences. Ultimately, this consideration may help us to understand the specific appeal of *The Piano* as a cult film for so many women.

Toward the end of *The Piano*, Ada's repressive husband Stewart lets her leave with Baines, a worker on his estate with whom she has been having an unconventional affair. With Maoris to bring her beloved piano to shore and to man the boat, Ada, Baines and her daughter Flora set off for their new life together. During the voyage, Ada unexpectedly demands that the piano be thrown overboard. Initially reluctant to do so because he knows how much the instrument has meant to Ada, Baines is finally persuaded, and the rope tying the piano to the boat is undone.

As the Maoris heave the instrument overboard, Ada slips her ankle into the rope, going over the edge with it, but as she sinks to the bottom of the sea, she resolves not to drown, struggles successfully to be free of the rope, and ascends, rescued from her previous impulses.

The momentousness of Ada's choices is conveyed by the number of dramatic reversals the scene involves. Ada sacrifices the piano she has adamantly insisted upon having throughout the film, just at the moment when she achieves a change in circumstances that would allow her unbounded access to it. She then impulsively decides to sacrifice herself along with it, only to save herself in the last instant. Michael Nyman's plaintive score and the slow-motion underwater cinematography stress the suspense and gravity of Ada's decision to 'choose life'. Further, in the sea's liminal space, as she leaves behind Stewart's unyielding patriarchal ways and approaches life with a man associated with the Maoris' less oppressive ways, she sunders her relationship with the piano – the one thing that gave her the power of expression in patriarchal and colonialist contexts. As she severs her ties to this archetype of Western culture, she appears to cast off the rituals that have long regulated her life. Her rejection of the piano signifies the refusal of the contexts that necessitated her retreat to this oasis of expression, particularly those that created and sustained her self-imposed exile into a rebellious state of muteness. As the piano goes over the boat's edge, it literally represents the weight of the past and its ability to drag Ada to her death. At this moment, Ada elects to explore a life less stringently regulated by the Victorian era's stark gender inequities.

Following this pivotal scene, the film appears to move toward a tranquil resolution. Now living in Nelson with Baines and her daughter, Ada is teaching piano. Through a prosthesis Baines fashioned to replace the fingertip severed by Stewart's axe, she is able to play again. She is also slowly learning to speak again. Although she works to regain her speech within a renovated family and social structure, her complete enculturation is indefinitely postponed. Because of her prosthesis, she is considered the 'town freak'. Baines is similarly an outsider; not only is he married to someone else, but his Maori markings continue to define him as Other in a white context. By her choice of partner and by her appearance, Ada thus manages to maintain a fringe identity within society, avoiding the complete assimilation that often characterizes closure in more conventional cinematic fare.

However, as the film's last shot vividly demonstrates, the narrative will not rest with this modestly qualified happy end. An image invoking the earlier overboard scene performs the film's final reversal. Ada has not left the past entirely behind after all; she still entertains the thought of her own death, visualized as a combination of a dream, a wish and a haunting. Through her internal voice, Ada discusses how at night she thinks about the fate she almost encountered. She imagines her piano in its ocean grave and sees herself tethered to it, as she once was, by an ankle caught in a rope. In her mind's eye, the piano sits at the bottom of

the sea, surrounded by plants and fish. This moment is presented through a single shot as the camera tracks back from the piano, losing her figure in the ocean's murkiness until the screen fades to black and the credits roll (figures 1–4). As the camera withdraws, Ada explains that, 'Down there everything is so still and silent that it allows me to sleep. It is a weird lullaby and so it is – it is mine'. Quoting from English poet Thomas Hood, Ada utters the closing words of *The Piano*: 'There is a silence where hath been no sound. There is a silence where no sound hath been, in the cold grave under the deep, deep sea'.

Figures 1–4
'There is a silence where no sound hath been...' ***The Piano***
(Jane Campion, 1993).

Clearly, the piano is still a force with which to contend, but the viewer is not sure how to interpret its surprise return and the accompanying depiction of Ada's other possible fate. This epilogue is, then, especially moving and provocative: its visual and aural presentation impart a compelling lyrical quality, while its unexpected and inexplicable representation of Ada's death, portrayed with some longing, create an enigma. Indeed, the mysteries of the interpretive and affective dimensions of this image have become a mainstay of my viewing of *The Piano*, from my first encounter with the film through each subsequent screening.

To begin to comprehend the impact of this closing shot, we can consider it as presenting a particularly rich example of cinematic imagery – what I shall call an 'arresting image'. Epitomizing the visual expressiveness usually associated with art films, the arresting image is a signature element of the genre. It occurs when a film stops to contemplate an exquisitely composed, significantly evocative and/or uncanny image. The forward motion of the narrative slows down or temporarily halts, allowing this spectacle to capture fully our attention. The arresting image may have an additionally unusual temporal status, often appearing outside of time in a fantasy or dream-like dimension. As it crystallizes the art film's expressiveness through striking visuals rendered in an impeded or otherwise altered time frame, this kind of imagery also embodies the genre's expected complexity and ambiguity.[10] The exact meaning of the arresting image is unclear; it is at once visually stirring and interpretively opaque. The mystifying qualities of the arresting image are, in turn, deeply related to its affective dimension. Its ability to stoke emotions in the audience that have been building through the film is part of its peculiar allure. However, although it serves as a focal point for emotions, this image does not typically provide sure resolution or catharsis. Just as it forestalls easy interpretation, its emotional effects are both intricate and obscure. We can consider the arresting image, then, as the 'money shot' of the art film insofar as it delivers a payoff for one of the genre's chief expected pleasures: contact with highly aestheticized, ambiguous and affecting imagery.

As a generic convention that foregrounds certain aspects of the art film's style and affect, the spectacular visual provides useful insight into the relationship between art films and their viewers. Like all images, arresting images can activate a web of associations in the viewer that indicates the pervasive role of intertextuality in response. By intertextuality I mean not only the texts, genres or media that an art film may refer to or invoke, but also those connections forged from the viewer's personal and cultural experiences. During the process of viewing, the text ignites associations – some of which it may have calculated, others of which are unpredictable and dependent upon the spectator's storehouse of images. Watching a film or other media text

10 David Bordwell, 'The art cinema as a mode of film practice', in Leo Braudy and Marshall Cohen (eds), *Film Theory and Criticism: Introductory Readings* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2004), pp. 774–82. Bordwell defines art cinema against the classical Hollywood norm, calling attention to the former's stylistic excess and inherent ambiguity.

inevitably brings into play innumerable variables drawn from such intertextual zones.

In *Lost in a Book*, Victor Nell invokes the familiar analogy of a pebble striking a pond to describe the complexities of response in reading, particularly how comprehension occurs. Nell argues that comprehension is often misunderstood as referring to the text's central point, when it really concerns the 'great rapidity of associative processes' set off during the text's decoding. Describing comprehension as a 'set of concentric circles', he argues that,

> After the first ripple taps the listener's episodic memory... each successive ripple draw[s] on a wider circle of idiosyncratic associations dislodged from the listener's autobiography. Each individual comprehension is an associative and therefore memory-enriched process; the enrichment derives from autobiographical... memory rather than from verifiable semantic memory.[11]

In other words, the role of autobiography during reading outweighs the power of language to control and shape the reader's thoughts.

When considering an audio-visual medium like film, the ripple effect is of course generated by a mode of representation different from literature. More substantively, although Nell's concept of this effect contributes to a revamped notion of comprehension, there is reason to qualify another aspect of his argument: that associations produced during this process are completely idiosyncratic. An individual's personal experience may indeed generate a unique set of associations in a textual encounter, but each ripple itself has discursive roots. Associations are drawn from discursive territories that traverse the text, the viewer, and their relationship. The ripple effect must be understood, then, as a highly mediated response influenced by social, cultural and ideological contexts.

Given its evocativeness and ambiguity, the art film's arresting image has perhaps a special status in relation to associative processes. Such images are evocative precisely because, along with their visual and aural richness, they have a persistent element of inscrutability. The solution to their interpretive and affective mysteries cannot be found solely within textual precincts, recoverable from sound exegesis. It is located in the vast, unruly intertextual network represented, at the very least, by the viewer's own backlog of visual experience. To comprehend the riddle of the affective force of the arresting image, then, it is necessary to perform a mini-archaeology of the associations it invokes. By tracking associations – not only those that the text prompts, but those that are unforeseen or appear quirky – we can begin to grasp the elusive nature of our enjoyment when confronted with an intensely engaging image.

To consider both the arresting image and the ripple effect in more detail, I return to my own fascination with the underwater denouement of

11 Victor Nell, *Lost in a Book: The Psychology of Reading for Pleasure* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1988), pp. 77, 78, 80. Nell, however, subscribes to the notion that the reader's imagination is freer to roam when reading popular fiction than it is when encountering difficult, modernist texts. He thus unnecessarily delimits the ripple effect by supporting the typical dichotomy between low and high cultural texts.

The Piano. Although this sequence doubtless elicits myriad visual links, three associations in particular have arisen automatically and involuntarily during my viewings. Two derive explicitly from past films, specifically Jean-Luc Godard's *Two or Three Things I Know About Her* (1966) and Alfred Hitchcock's *Rebecca* (1940), while the last comes from a recurrent childhood dream I had after watching *King Kong* (Merian C. Cooper and Ernest B. Schoedsack, 1933) on television. Until now, I have simply let these associations flit by without reflection or examination, thinking them inconsequential, not to mention wildly incongruous. Upon inspecting them more closely, however, I found surprising symmetries across a number of levels, from the formal to the ideological, symmetries that create connections across otherwise very different kinds of texts. Ultimately, these connections help to clarify the interpretive and affective dimensions of *The Piano*'s final vision of a woman tethered to a piano at the bottom of the sea. At the same time, they shed light on a significant aspect of spectatorship, in which the text catalyses digressions into the viewer's personal archives, in the process fracturing textual unity and remaking the text through the cultural pressures that underwrite individual response.

For me, *The Piano*'s closure vividly invokes a scene from Godard's film that presents a stellar – perhaps *the* stellar – example of an arresting image. Interspersed between shots of characters in a cafe, there is a series of increasingly closely framed shots of a cup of espresso. As the sounds from the cafe are temporarily muted, a nondiegetic narrator (Godard himself) muses about philosophical issues concerning language, identity, community, class and politics, leaving us to contemplate how these issues relate to the cup's dark interior.

Although this meditation interrupts the narrative, the narrative just as surely disrupts it: a woman looks at a magazine filled with pictures of women used to advertise various products; the proprietor makes another espresso; Juliette, a housewife and part-time prostitute, stares at a man; the man in turn smokes and reads a newspaper. When the camera cuts away from these characters, it immerses us in a universe captured in the small circle of the demitasse with its agitated bubbles. This universe, with its combination of whispered metaphysics, impeded, abstract time and extreme close-ups in widescreen, transforms a simple demitasse that would otherwise be lost within the banalities of cafe life into an unexpectedly lyrical and elegant landscape worthy of our reverie (figures 5–7).

In its mingling of reflective voiceover, a sense of time standing still outside of the narrative flow, and a poetic, mystifying image, this sequence from *Two or Three Things I Know About Her* bears a resemblance to *The Piano*'s closing shot, forging a relationship between quite distinct art films. These films were produced during different historical eras by directors, one a man, the other a woman, working within the framework of different styles, film movements and national

...since I constantly blame myself,
though I feel innocent...

...since I cannot escape crushing
objectivity or isolating subjectivity...

...today when revolutions are
impossible and wars threaten me...
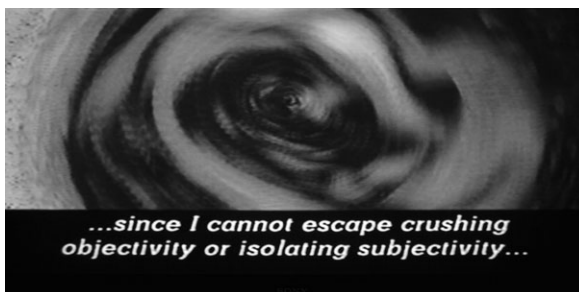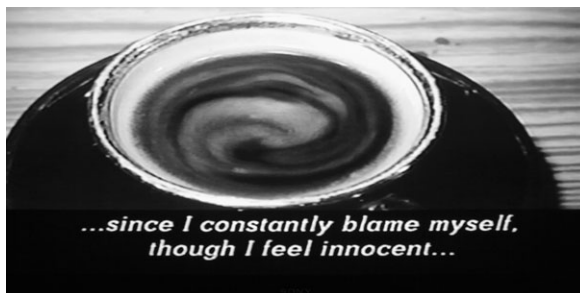
Figures 5–7
The demitasse transformed: an
unexpectedly lyrical and elegant
landscape. *Two or Three Things*
I Know About Her **(Jean-Luc**
Godard, 1966).

contexts. Yet, the films deploy the generic convention of the arresting image in formally similar ways. The major difference lies in Godard's willingness, inspired by Brechtian aesthetics, to disturb the spectator's rapport with this image by continually cutting back to the cafe's denizens. The fact that the espresso cup's aural and visual presentation still manages to captivate testifies to the potency, even seductiveness, of this form of heightened, contemplative, cinematic expression.

While these moments from the Godard and Campion films have generic affinities, it is important to point out that arresting images are not the sole province of certain national art cinemas. They can be readily found in an array of other media forms, including avant-garde works, television, photography, commercial films, reality videos and advertisements. The desire to produce a transfixing image is, in a sense,

the Holy Grail of media culture. When the great ship in *Titanic* is perpendicular to the water's surface and poised to go under, we see one example of how central awe-inspiring visuals are to contemporary image-making, particularly when they are achieved through special effects. In this case, such visuals showcase the filmmaker's brilliance and the industry's economic power, just as they help to crystallize the ultimate affective ambitions of the disaster film. In *Titanic*, the essential moment of disaster – the ship's sinking – is cinematically spectacular and highly emotional, filling the audience with amazement and dread.

Unlike most arresting images in art films, however, this kind of Hollywood spectacle has immediate legibility. As in many Hollywood films, the indelible image does not wish to be truly mysterious; rather, it represents the culmination of the film's narrative trajectory and emotional structure. Thus, one distinction between arresting images in blockbusters and in art films lies in the former's repudiation of ambiguity. In this sense, these contrasting uses of arresting images subscribe to the traditional opposition between Hollywood and art cinemas. As scholars such as Peter Wollen and David Bordwell have argued, the classic form strives for transparency, while the modernist form pursues stylistic and narrative complexity and ambiguity.[12]

Acknowledging this difference, I do not offer it as the basis of an aesthetic judgment – that art films are somehow better than blockbusters because of their interest in ambiguous imagery. Indeed, art cinema is as invested in manipulating and commodifying the arresting image as any other type of film. More importantly, there is ultimately little use in pursuing sharp distinctions between films with arresting images, given the cross-pollination that characterizes media today. We should instead regard the arresting image's characteristics and impact as variably realized across multiple film genres and between films in those genres. No matter where it appears, though, the arresting image functions to signify artfulness through a self-conscious display of a moment of strange beauty, reminding viewers that films are, after all, composed of images.

Films that aspire towards artfulness within the context of recognized Hollywood genres often predominently feature arresting images to demonstrate their special boundary-crossing status. In fact, the arresting image is a mobile signifier that helps give this kind of cinema its 'art film' credentials. Certainly, David Lynch's oeuvre comes to mind here. A director who has built his reputation on an ability to conjure up freaky visions, Lynch's films may represent a case of the excessive production of arresting images. One has only to think of the visage and shock-therapy hairstyle of the main character in Lynch's independent horror film *Eraserhead* (1978) or the dead man standing in the murder scene in small-town noir *Blue Velvet* (1986) (figures 8 and 9) to begin to enumerate the provocative and memorable images his work has

12 Peter Wollen, 'Godard and counter-cinema: *Vent d'Est*', in Bill Nichols (ed.), *Movies and Methods, V. II* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1985), pp. 500–509; Bordwell, 'The art cinema as a mode of film practice'.

Figures 8 and 9
Murder victims Don Vallens
(Dick Green) and the Yellow
Man/Detective T.R. Gordon
(Fred Pickler). *Blue Velvet*
(David Lynch, 1986).

Figures 10 and 11
Travis Bickle (Robert de Niro),
Iris Steensma (Jody Foster), and
police officers in the aftermath
of Bickle's climactic shooting
spree. *Taxi Driver* **(Martin**
Scorsese, 1976).

generated, as well as to see how easily arresting images traverse different filmmaking modes and genres.

Moreover, such moments are showstoppers: the image's bizarre and baffling nature freezes the narrative flow momentarily as characters seek to understand what they see. In this vein, other films portray arresting images through cinematic means that more overtly slow or stop the action. Toward the end of Martin Scorsese's urban noir *Taxi Driver* (1976), for instance, Travis Bickle commits a mass murder in a brothel. After he concludes his rampage, a lingering high-angle shot transposes the frenetic whirl of carnage into a tableau, a still life that amplifies the rampage's horrors by immobilizing its content and providing a morbid bird's-eye view of its aftermath (figures 10 and 11). Director John Woo's routine use of slow motion in his films to compose highly aesthetic images is considered a signature element of his hard-boiled cop films. In *Face/Off* (1997), for example, Woo depicts a child listening on earphones to Judy Garland's song of utopian yearning from *The Wizard of Oz* (Victor Fleming, 1939), 'Somewhere Over the Rainbow', in the midst of a firefight between drug lords and the police. Like many other directors seeking to produce arresting images, Woo orchestrates their impact by juxtaposing incongruous elements. Such incongruities often engender transformative effects, where characters, actions and objects are rewritten into unexpected contexts of meaning. Thus, in the family melodrama *American Beauty* (Sam Mendes, 1999), the prosaic image of a plastic bag blowing in the street, captured on home video, metamorphoses into a signifier of grace and wonder, as the film slows down to let characters and the audience marvel at this object's new perceptual status (figures 12 and 13). The fact that this scene was inspired by a similar moment in Nathan Dorsky's *Variations* (1992–8), an avant-garde experiment with montage featuring a procession of

dreamlike visuals, continues to underscore the networking that occurs between different modes of cinema at the level of imagery.

These examples, then, clarify several other aspects of the arresting image as convention. We have already seen that this image exemplifies the visual expressiveness expected of art films and that it appears as a moment of intense contemplation, frequently through a distension or immobilization of time that counters the narrative flow. Further, the image often crystallizes a film's enigmatic emotional and thematic resonances, conveying a sense of lyricism or depth of meaning. Scenes from the films above confirm that the arresting image operates additionally to indicate the presence of the director's hand. The image radiates intentionality, an especially self-conscious intervention of the filmmaker's stylistic signature into the world he or she has created. We can also see more clearly that arresting images are often generated by juxtaposing incongruous elements (for example, *Face/Off*'s innocent listening to Garland against a backdrop of violent action) or by changing an object's status, especially when this change converts the everyday into the sublime (for example, *Two or Three Things*' demitasse and *American Beauty*'s plastic bag).

To a certain extent, these incongruities and transformations recall a surrealist aesthetic. Indeed, Campion's work has been associated with surrealism, an influence unmistakable in *The Piano*'s final scene with its eerie combination of submerged woman and piano – a distant relative, perhaps, of the scene from *Un Chien Andalou* (Salvador Dali and Luis Buñuel, 1928) in which a man drags a piano draped with donkey carcasses across an apartment floor. With its dream-like, unexpected juxtapositions and transfigurations of objects, the arresting image defamiliarizes its contents in surprising, sometimes shocking ways. Yet, this association between contemporary art films and surrealism is unstable. Art cinema often strives to maximize the exotic beauty of such images to amplify their aesthetic status. This aim contrasts with the more radical surrealist formulations interested in defying the sense of the sublime associated with art so as to outrage middlebrow audiences. The art film's arresting image delivers the kind of experience such audiences expect from a form that tries to rise above mass culture: it exposes them to an intense perceptual moment not immediately comprehensible in terms of narrative function or theme, yet oddly touching or emotionally compelling. Indeed, art cinema 'astonishes the bourgeoisie'[13] with highly

13 Director Billy Wilder, quoted in his obituary on the subject of flashy cinematic style, 'Billy Wilder, caustic filmmaker with slashing wit and stinging satire, dies', *New York Times*, 29 March 2002, Section A, p. 21.

stylized visual feats and ambiguous, provocative meanings, meant to define its directors, films and viewers as exceptional, as existing outside of mass culture's ordinary fray.

As further testimony to the fact that arresting images cross a spectrum of genres and texts, my second association with *The Piano*'s final scene hails from Hollywood, specifically 'quality' studio filmmaking. Directed by Alfred Hitchcock and produced by David O. Selznick as a prestige adaptation of Daphne du Maurier's novel by the same name, *Rebecca* is a hybrid, designed as an artful woman's film. Like *The Piano*, *Rebecca* belongs to a particular subspecies of the woman's film, namely the Gothic melodrama. In the Gothic's formula, a relatively powerless woman enters an alien domain where she is subject to her husband's will or that of another man; Ada and the heroine of *Rebecca* travel, respectively, to a New Zealand outpost and a British mansion to begin new lives with men who are essentially unknown to them. The woman struggles with questions of identity until she discovers the passion that has been lurking all along in the heart of her true love, a man previously characterized by cold or suspicious behaviour. There are variations, but closure in the typical Gothic melodrama finds both heroine and hero redeemed. As the female protagonist discovers the truth about her intended, she establishes a more self-assured identity, less compromised by fear and subjection. Conversely, once freed from constraints that have prevented him from relieving the heroine's oppressive emotional and physical state, the hero is shown to be a loyal, loving partner.

Rebecca commences at the end of this chain of events. After the film's opening credits, the heroine recounts a dream she has had concerning her previous place of residence: her husband Maxim de Winter's family estate, Manderley. This narration and its dream imagery serve as a prelude to a flashback that will constitute the rest of the film. The heroine, who remains nameless throughout *Rebecca*, begins, 'Last night I dreamt I went to Manderley again'. In this fantasy return, she describes her spirit-like movement through the gates and down the path to the mansion. The estate has been overtaken by the 'long tenacious fingers' of nature, which has come into its own again. Even so, nothing could 'mar the perfect symmetry of those walls' of the now 'secretive and silent' Manderley. Although its windows are temporarily animated by moonlight, giving the appearance of life, we learn that fire has decimated the building. As the narrator says, it is now nothing more than a 'desolate shell'. She concludes, 'We can never go back to Manderley again', but she does return in her dreams and thinks about how her past has led to her present.

Like the associative link to *Two or Three Things I Know About Her*, the connection between *The Piano* and this scene arises partially from *Rebecca*'s specific articulation of the arresting image, that is, from a series of formal symmetries. Manderley appears outside of narrative time in the 'frozen' space of dream contemplation. Against a cloudy, moonlit

sky and a misty landscape, the scene offers us the ghost of Manderley. By extension, it also offers us the ghost of its former mistress, Rebecca, who materializes only in relation to her absent-presence in the film's mise-en-scene. Existing in an oneiric space and time, the once baronial setting, overtaken by nature and decay, becomes a transfixing image (figures 14 and 15).

These scenes also share a certain sound design that helps to enhance their associations, as well as their ability to captivate. Both *The Piano* and *Rebecca* use female voiceovers.[14] Whether male or female, though, the voiceovers in the Campion, Godard and Hitchcock films are internal, coming from the narrator's subjectivity. Combined with the delicate quality of each voice, the narration's subjective status promotes the sensation that the viewer is being taken into the narrator's confidence. Ada's lilting, diminutive expressions, the whispered intonations of Godard's philosopher, and the soft, refined diction of *Rebecca*'s unnamed heroine draw part of their affective power from the intimacy and vulnerability conveyed through the grain of their voices. In such cases, as Barthes observes, listening pleasure arises not from the voice's sheer ability to communicate, but from the materiality of the language, a certain 'voluptuousness of its sound-signifiers'.[15] Heightening this effect, at least for a US viewer, the narrators speak either with an accent or in a foreign tongue, distinguishing their voices as more exotic than those

14 Kathleen McHugh discusses female narrators as central to the moral complexity of Campion's films in, '"Sounds that creep inside you": female narration and voice-over in the films of Jane Campion', *Style*, vol. 35, no. 2 (2001), pp. 193–218. Also, in *Cinema and Sentiment* (pp. 104–31), Affron examines the relationship between voice and pathos. Analysing *Johnny Belinda* (Jean Negulesco, 1948), a film about a woman who is a deaf-mute, he argues that the interplay of silence and sound results in a mutual dramatization that makes the sound track particularly effective emotionally.

15 Roland Barthes, 'The grain of the voice', trans. Stephen Heath, in *Image, Music, Text* (New York, NY: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 1977), p. 182.

Figures 14 and 15 Overtaken by nature: Manderley in the frozen space of dream contemplation. *Rebecca* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1940).

involved in everyday discourse. As their vocal qualities transcend quotidian communication with its purposeful exchange of information, the narrators' musings gain a privileged perceptual status that lends emotional force to the charged images accompanying them. In the Godard and Campion scenes, the absence or belated entry of film music – the typical signifier of film emotion – allows each voice to command the sound track and to exercise its peculiar trance-like effects with special vividness. Without the voiceovers, the eerie beauty of these images could not achieve the intimate bonds with the viewer so necessary for their full impact.

Narrative and thematic symmetries explain further why these three films might have materialized as associations for me. *Rebecca*'s central mystery involves the title character's fate. At the story's outset Maxim de Winter's first wife is already dead; we are told that she drowned at sea, dragged down into its depths by a sinking ship. The intrigue surrounding her demise revolves around the question of whether her death was an accident, a suicide or a murder at her husband's hands. As it turns out, Rebecca, willful and promiscuous, was dying of cancer and baited Maxim with claims that she was pregnant by another man, hoping that Maxim would kill her and be charged with murder. In the film version, unlike the novel (where Maxim does indeed kill his first wife), an accidental fall against some ship's tackle ends Rebecca's life; Maxim is guilty of nothing more than a cover-up. With the facts revealed about Rebecca's medical condition, the inquest rules her death a suicide. Maxim and his second wife are thus spared further emotional and legal obstructions to their union. Until the revelation about Rebecca's horrific nature, the second Mrs de Winter had mistakenly thought that Maxim still loved Rebecca. No longer intimidated by the spectacle of female perfection Rebecca's legend had represented, she assumes her rightful place as Maxim's wife. The last vestige of Rebecca's identity is destroyed when Mrs Danvers, the housekeeper, sets fire to Manderley in a rage. Except for the dream, the past is dead.

Obviously, both *Rebecca* and *The Piano* present watery graves for female characters pulled under by a vessel of some sort. Further, the sea provides a crucible for determining female identity. As Tania Modleski has argued, Gothic melodramas present an extreme drama of female identity that ultimately has a therapeutic dimension.[16] The Gothic replicates certain conditions of marriage, emphasizing the psychological variables involved, particularly paranoia. In each film, the female character leaves home to enter a strange new world dominated by a male figure who possesses economic and symbolic power as patriarch and lord of the mansion. This situation forces a crisis in identity for the heroine, which is typically resolved by her attaining a more mature, albeit normative, status as a happily married woman cared for by a man who recognizes her worth. Certainly, by the end of *Rebecca*, the nameless one has been reconciled to both patriarchy and class privilege as she becomes the true wife of her wealthy, rather imperious husband. As we have seen,

16 Tania Modleski, *Loving with a Vengeance: Mass-Produced Fantasies for Women* (New York, NY and London: Routledge, 1990), pp. 59–84.

The Piano's dual and dueling endings provide a complicated variation on this convention: Ada appears initially to be free from the most onerous forms of colonial and patriarchal domination while holding on to a non-normative identity; yet the imaginary return to her underwater corpse troubles the happy end, closing the film on a profoundly ambiguous note.

Whatever the nature of closure, each film presents the complex conditions under which women struggle to gain self-awareness. This focus on problems of female identity also defines *Two or Three Things I Know About Her*, which can be considered a woman's film insofar as it depicts the plight of women within consumer capitalism. Juliette is both a housewife and a prostitute, thus embodying the two female stereotypes demanded by this social system. As mother and whore, Juliette simultaneously upholds the family structure upon which this system relies and participates in the commodity culture built on the exploitation of female sexuality.

Although each film stages a crisis in female identity, none addresses this crisis in unproblematic terms. The politics of each film are imperfect, delivering what we might regard as a flawed feminism. As Laura Mulvey and Colin MacCabe have noted, Godard's representation of women is riddled with contradictory impulses.[17] Like many of his films, in the process of revealing how capitalism exploits women and eroticizes their image to sell consumer goods, *Two or Three Things* ultimately essentializes women as personifications of sexuality. *Rebecca* resolves its painful portrait of the psychic place of women in marriage moralistically by demonizing the titular character's independence as a threat to patriarchy and rewarding the second wife's meekness and obedience. As for *The Piano*, Campion uses the nineteenth-century outpost setting to depict the domination of women and people of color by white male landowners, mounting an ambitious critique of colonialism, patriarchy and Victorian morality. Yet, as the film proceeds, it positions the Maoris on the side of nature, emphasizing their sexuality as well as their primitive and childlike behaviour (as, for example, when they attack a theatre stage during a play, mistaking the drama's illusions for reality). Some critics have thus accused Campion of defining native cultures according to stereotypes of the Other in the Western imaginary.[18] Further, Ada may defy her repressive husband and flout moral convention by having an affair, but her erotic activities tie her to Baines, a man who engaged in sexual blackmail to win her. The film's critiques, then, are quite vexed by gains and losses in the interplay of competing ideological imperatives.

Rather than reject these films for their contradictions, we might consider their 'messy' ideologies as lying at the core of their affective impact. By blurring clean ideological lines, they lure the viewer into an epistemological quest, a protracted attempt to clarify and resolve their contradictions. At a deeper level, though, their troubled ideologies appeal to a certain realpolitik of the female subject: they objectify the trauma and complexity of the acquisition of identity in circumstances of

17 Laura Mulvey and Colin MacCabe, 'Images of woman, images of sexuality', in Colin MacCabe (ed.), *Godard: Images, Sounds, Politics* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1980), pp. 79–104.

18 For example, Dyson, 'The return of the repressed?' and Leonie Pihama's 'Ebony and ivory: construction of the Maori in *The Piano*', in Harriet Margolis (ed.), *Jane Campion's The Piano* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 114–34, consider the film's problematic relation to colonialism and race in the context of contemporary New Zealand.

domination, demonstrating that this process does not result in a linear sweep of the old by the new. The process itself haunts the genealogy of identity formation represented in the films and in the female viewer's own experience, meaning that subjectivity is forever populated with visions of past selves and possibilities. The arresting images in the two Gothic melodramas offer particularly poignant crystallizations of this theme.

The successive close-ups of the demitasse in *Two or Three Things I Know About Her* achieve some affective force from the counterpoint between the prostitute's quotidian 'pick-up' world in the cafe and the whispering narrator's philosophical tract on language and community. However, the moving quality of the arresting images in *Rebecca* and *The Piano* owes more to the portrayal of the slippage of identities across the personal histories of the central female characters. In *Rebecca*, all that remains of the nameless one's psychic torment is the dream of the 'desolate shell' of Manderley – burned out, deserted and recaptured by nature. In its decrepitude, the estate represents the final resting place for the unruly Rebecca's spirit and the threat of that past. Ada's encounter with self-annihilation is her soporific return to the deep, deep sea. As Manderley represents the site of our heroine's trials, its barren state also signals the death of that former searching, insecure identity. As the piano incarnates Western culture, its watery grave ends its ability to define the parameters of female expression and transgression (as it has acted as both Ada's voice and the alibi for her adulterous liaisons). Revisiting the destruction of the family estate or of the piano, the heroine appears to savour the moment when the burdensome past no longer has the power to regulate her choices. She is free and born anew.

However, the romantic representation of these images in the context of a dream suggests that this is only a partial explanation. Normally, such dreams would elicit the more alarmed response characteristic of nightmares, especially nightmares involving the dreamer's death, but the protagonists recount their visions with some nostalgia, even longing. The images' beauty and lyricism enhance the sense of pleasure in the return. The heroines appear, then, to desire that previous self, mired though it was in patriarchy, persecution and confusion – to yearn for that other scene even as it represents the extinction of personality. Following the logic of cultural domination to the end of the line, self-abnegation seems a seductive option. Hence, the past order persists at the level of desire even in the redeemed or reconstructed woman.

Yet another part of the appeal of these visions is that they archive an extreme version of female will. Like snapshots in family albums, the remembered images in both films preserve the narrative of confrontation between an obstreperous female and her dominators. Certainly, in contrast to *Rebecca*'s protagonist, much is made of Ada's will in *The Piano* and her ability to press her desires in the face of formidable opposition. In this sense, there is a kinship between Ada and Rebecca. Because Campion chooses to celebrate rather than demonize her, Ada is

19 In *Hitchcock's Films Revisited* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1989), Robin Wood argues that *Rebecca*'s true heroine is the title character, because she so clearly reflects male anxieties about autonomous, adult femininity, while providing a powerful alternative to the 'good wife' story (p. 347).

a more acceptably progressive version of the independent and sexualized Rebecca.[19] Both, though, are madwomen in the ocean, women who, because they refuse to play their proper roles within patriarchy, are dramatically relegated to spaces outside of the community – whether permanently, as in Rebecca's watery grave, or temporarily, as in Ada's recurring fantasy.

These images thus map out the 'before and after' of female identity within systems of domination, embodying the contradictory aspects of this identity as it has been forged across time. In the context of films that are ideologically vexed, these arresting images enact a series of conflicting fantasies that alternately celebrate a victorious femininity, a self that signifies the end of the struggle for identity, and a battle of female will against the powers-that-be. The point is not that the films have it one way or the other. These arresting images achieve affective power because they thrust the contradictions to the surface and refuse to resolve them. In sustaining this tension, the images animate the clashes and anomalies that bedevil female subjectivity. This sense of anomaly is critical to the emotions conjured by the arresting image. Just as the vision of the submerged woman and piano is surreal in its odd and surprising juxtaposition of elements, the representation of female subjectivity, shaped by collisions between past and present, between oppressed and liberated versions of the self, is incongruous, uncomfortable and moving.

The Piano's final image simulates the struggles and emotions involved in the evolution of female identity, tapping into the female viewer's subjective vault. Here identification operates in the broadest sense. Rather than identify exclusively with a character or a situation, the viewer finds the allusions to the organization of experience compelling. As Robert Stam and Ella Shohat argue, the relationship between spectator and film is shaped by an analogical structure of feeling, a 'structuring of filmic identification across social, political, and cultural situations, through strongly perceived or dimly felt affinities of social perception or historical experience'. The viewer's recognition of a correspondence in experience between the cinematic and the personal forges an 'imaginative space of alliance', a topic to which I shall shortly return.[20]

20 Robert Stam and Ella Shohat, 'From the imperial family to the transnational imaginary: media spectatorship in the age of globalization', in Rob Wilson and Wimal Dissanayake (eds), *Global/Local: Cultural Production and the Transnational Imaginary* (Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 1996), p. 161.

The connections I have traced thus far between *The Piano*, *Two or Three Things I Know About Her* and *Rebecca* lie generally within an accepted realm of intertextuality – a family of cinematic images. While these films are drawn from my own repertoire of cinematic encounters, autobiography also leads to a more explicitly private association. We have seen how characters' dreams and dreamlike landscapes inform arresting images. Perhaps it is not surprising, then, that these cinematic elements might elicit a real dream as part of an associative web. When I was about ten years old, I began to have a recurring nightmare that seemed indebted to a viewing of *King Kong* on television (see figures 16 and 17). In the nightmare, I awoke with my heart pounding from a bad dream, only to see a large figure standing in the doorway. The figure

turned out to be a big, hairy ape who then commenced to chase me all
over the countryside. In a final attempt to escape, I leapt straight up into
the air in a 'dream shot' framed much like a photograph or movie image.
Within this frame, I could see my ankle and foot at the top and my
pursuer's paw and arm reaching up from below. Just as it appeared that I
would escape, the marker '101 feet' flashed on the top right of the frame,
representing the height I had jumped (and perhaps the fact that I had
recently seen *One Hundred and One Dalmations* [Disney, 1961]). At that
moment, the ape grabbed my ankle and I realized that I was doomed.
Shortly thereafter, I really woke up and realized, as one does, that it
was just a dream, albeit a dream within a dream.

Although I wish I had something less transparent and more interesting
to offer the Freudian canon, the dream's sexual imagery is textbook in all
respects, not the least of which is the huge ape to represent the phallus.
However, the connection with *The Piano*'s arresting image lies less in
any distinct Freudian correspondences than in the way the visual
geography and thematic resonance of the film's imagery echoes that of
my nightmare. Just as Ada is bound to the piano by her ankle, so I was
thus caught by the ape. Fear and the urge for self-preservation in the face
of what appear to be overwhelming patriarchal forces also lend a certain
symmetry to these dream images. Moreover, remembrance is central.
The arresting images from *Rebecca* and *The Piano* occur through
character reminiscences that trace an odyssey between past and present
selves. Similarly, my nightmare can only appear as an association
through a recollection that compares then and now.

Such connections are further fuelled by the strong presence of the
elemental that courses through the associated films.[21] *The Piano*'s final
scene achieves an impact not only because of aural and pictorial lyricism,
but because it relies to a certain extent on primal imagery that, through
the ripple effect, links to other visuals with a similar investment. The
Gothic melodramas draw from imagery of water, fire and nature more
generally, emphasizing how nature ultimately overtakes culture. In the
first part of Campion's film, the high-angle shots of the piano on the
coastline emphasize its tremendous vulnerability to the forces of the sea.
In the epilogue, the piano, surrounded by plants and fish at ocean's
bottom, has succumbed to these forces. Ada hovers above, with her
billowing skirt giving her the appearance of an exotic underwater flower.

21 Dana Polan discusses *The Piano*'s
primal and elemental imagery in
more detail in *Jane Campion*
(London: British Film Institute,
2001), pp. 30–3.

Articulating the opposition between nature and culture that the film has employed to critique colonialism and Victorian-era patriarchy, the image is thus thematized. *Rebecca*'s opening emphasizes how nature encroaches on the stately Manderley and its pathways, while presenting the sea as a central visual motif and fire as the only means of trumping the family demons, at least for a time. In turn, the 'Kong' dream is inspired by a film that features a literal return to the primaeval – the marshes, jungles and predatory inhabitants of a prehistoric world.

Ultimately, this elemental imagery fuels the affective impact of scenarios that play out the terrors of otherness within inhospitable foreign terrains. Like the other films, *King Kong* tells the story of displaced people, traversing unfamiliar and threatening terrains defined and dominated by patriarchal and/or colonial interests. The white film troupe surrounded by hostile 'natives' and dinosaurs introduces the collision-of-worlds theme so important to the film's narrative. However, it is Kong – the captured, giant 'black' ape trapped within a colonial setting as a spectacular attraction – that more dramatically conveys the poignant sense of alienation in cross-cultural circumstances. As *King Kong*, *The Piano*, *Two or Three Things* and *Rebecca* each stage the meeting of two or more worlds, the term 'cross-cultural' signifies not just the literal confrontation of different countries, but also of different genders, classes and races. Ideally, Kong should then join Ada, Juliette and the two Mrs de Winters as one of the culturally dispossessed. However, a white ten-year-old girl's nightmares cast him in the role of an overwhelming antagonist, embracing the colonialist narrative to amplify stereotypical notions of a hyper-masculine racialized threat. In my web of associations, the elemental imagery of arresting images underscores feminine anxieties in patriarchal environments, anxieties that can be articulated through ideologically aware, as well as unreconstructed or 'politically incorrect', subject positions.

The associations between this network of narratives – the Kong dream, the Cooper/Schoedsack, Hitchcock, Godard and Campion films – rely on an interplay of resonant, deeply rooted cultural materials to achieve their effects. Arresting images are at one and the same time *arrested* images. Regression – going back to a personal and cultural mother lode of images, discourses and experiences – is a fundamental dynamic in the reception of the captivating visual. Psychoanalytic film theory has amply addressed spectatorship's regressive aspects, particularly cinema's invocation of the mirror stage, one of the earliest psychic moments of childhood development.[22] The evolutionary nature of subjectivity also involves a less universal, more culturally specific and individual dimension. Acts of reading and viewing necessarily mobilize both past and present aspects of the viewer's personal experience – a continuum of subjectivity. The viewer is a storehouse of images as well as an embodiment of personal history that can be potentially activated during reception, shaping textual meaning. When we are particularly entranced by a film or an image, we experience a heightened instance of

22 In *The Imaginary Signifier. Psychoanalysis and the Cinema*, trans. Celia Britton et al. (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1982), Christian Metz provides a representative example of the literature in film studies on regression.

the visual media's ability to stimulate not only an aesthetic response, but a reaction generated from the archives that comprise individual subjectivities, a reaction that reaches back to our respective 'stone ages', dragging with it the clamoring voices of our various and changing historical selves.

The volatility of this combination of histories suggests that the digressive dynamic in reception need not end in a simple confirmation of established tastes and perspectives – a reoccupation of some regressive space, for example. The family of images created through digression does provide pleasure by endorsing visual and cultural patterns the viewer finds compelling. At the same time, this dialogue between images can result in the viewer's reflection on what she or he finds enjoyable and why. This reflection on one's own tastes is liable to be elicited especially by 'troubled' texts that do not adequately resolve their contradictions and, like all open wounds, require constant attention. In any case, tracking associations can lead to a questioning of one's own viewing preferences, helping to unmask the cultural and ideological dynamics that underpin even the simplest acts of taste.

Although they may be activated by similar textual elements, associative webs are idiosyncratic, varying from spectator to spectator. The chance nature of the association – its aleatory, whimsical and transitory character – would seem to relegate it to the backwaters of reception study. However, granting that associations are involuntary and heterogeneous, I have argued that their general structure of correspondences and cultural indebtedness demonstrates a certain systematic nature that belies their apparent lack of substance. Within specific instances of viewing, associations are characterized by a surprising degree of coherence. This coherence is suggestive for understanding the viewing process, especially as it provokes digression.

The Piano's final scene has provided an opportunity to tease out the latent logic behind one particular set of associations. The associations that occur between *The Piano*'s arresting image and those of other texts are created through a series of parallelisms – parallelisms that cover a broad territory from the visual to the cultural. In my viewing, these parallels have materialized as symmetries in voiceover narration, the rendering of time, the surreal transformation or juxtaposition of objects, and the presence of the elemental, supported by themes involving crises in female identity within the fantasy framework of the dream. Associative webs are built on such intricate correspondences. The time of viewing and our subsequent reflections about a text become a potential wonderland of associations.

Far from being unbounded, then, the associations that arise from the ripple effect are rooted in the viewer's cultural experience. In the case of associations between the arresting images of *The Piano*, *Rebecca*, *Two or Three Things*, *King Kong* and the Kong dream, the pattern of connections that emerges is drawn, at the very least, from my background

as a white, middle-class female subject, film academic and cinephile. The source of my fascination rests on a certain combination of aural and visual elements within the context of a particular structuring of female experience that focuses on momentous shifts in identity and self-recognition. Such narratives pair the beauties of surreal and elemental imagery with the seductive appeal of the feminist or quasi-feminist *Bildungsroman*. They thus act to aestheticize the standard mass cultural fantasy of the female subject's maturing and redemption, found in various forms designed for consumption by women from Harlequin romances and Gothic melodramas to chick flicks. The art or hybrid film provides a series of twists to the raw therapeutic dimension of such sagas, lending particular cinematic expressiveness and narrative ambiguity to the fantasy. The female viewer can thus have it both ways: she can savour the retelling of a familiar woman's story while finding pleasure in the aesthetic complexity that dramatically renovates the retold tale.

Hence, while particulars between spectators surely vary, *The Piano* invites personalization – a prime characteristic of cult relationships to film[23] – through its graphic reenactment of a drama of female identity that has the potential to intersect in heterogeneous ways with viewers' experiences. In general, the arresting image's affective dimensions arise from its ability to radiate outward toward other texts that amplify, negotiate or play with templates of experience. When viewers digress during viewing, they activate different aesthetic and experiential registers that, in turn, begin to reveal the sometimes unexpected cultural forces at work during reception.

The art film's arresting image thus foregrounds a routine aspect of spectatorship – the occurrence of digression through a chain reaction of associations. Substantially fuelled by a collusion between autobiography and film, the ripple effect becomes law in any textual encounter. The fact that intricate correspondences thrive in what appears to be an inattentive reaction – the mind wandering from the text itself – sheds light on how texts are experienced. Our appreciation and emotional response derive not only from textual manipulations of formal and narrative elements, but from confluences of aural and visual elements that cross textual boundaries through the ripple effect. Neither interpretation nor affect results simply from the realization of textual strategies; the way those strategies fuse with the viewer's catalogue of experience excites intertextual associations that inform assessment and pleasure. In this sense, all texts are immoderately open – none are particularly privileged in being able to control the shape and destiny of their meaning. However, to acknowledge this, personal responses, as they are inscribed within cultural pressures, must enter the interpretive mix, including affective responses that stray from the precincts of the text.

That said, we must recognize that there is no way to comprehend fully how the personal interacts with a text. Each individual, as Gramsci notes, is 'the product of the historical process to date which has deposited in [that individual] an infinity of traces, without leaving an inventory'.

23 Umberto Eco, 'Casablanca: cult movies and intertextual collage', trans. William Weaver, in *Travels in Hyperreality* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Company, 1990), p. 198.

24 Popular Memory Group, 'Popular memory: theory, politics, method', in Richard Johnson, Gregor McLennan, Bill Schwarz and David Sutton (eds), *Making Histories: Studies in History Writing and Politics* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1982), p. 211.

A study that modestly attempts to approach the inventory must concern itself with the interplay between public and private discourses in the constitution of specific responses, regarding the personal as a 'strangely composite construction, resembling a kind of geology, the selective sedimentation of past traces'.[24] Granting the impossibility of drawing up a total inventory of traces that could explain the myriad digressions that take place during reception, we can still track some of the dominant elements that course through these digressions, particularly as they provide insight into how templates inflected by social identities figure into reception. Even a partial exploration of the associative process reveals dynamics of meaning-making and affect that go precipitously over the edge of the text into cultural waters that are as unpredictable as they are worthy of charting.

Narrating the new Japan: Biograph's
The Hero of Liao-Yang (1904)

GREGORY A. WALLER

1 'The Japanese invasion,' *Moving Picture World*, vol. 6, no. 21 (28 May 1910), p. 873.

2 Relevant studies that examine the cross-cultural representation of what I am calling Japan-in-America during this period include Gina Marchetti, *Romance and the 'Yellow Peril': Race, Sex, and Discursive Strategies in Hollywood Fiction* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1993); Daniel Bernardi (ed.), *The Birth of Whiteness: Race and the Emergence of U.S. Cinema* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1996); Lisa Lowe, *Immigrant Acts: On Asian American Cultural Politics* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1996); Robert G. Lee, *Orientals: Asian Americans in Popular Culture* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1999); Josephine Lee, Imogene L. Lim and Yuko Matsukawa (eds), *Re/Collecting Early Asian America: Essays in Cultural History* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2002); and Colleen Lye, *America's Asia: Racial Form and American Literature, 1893–1945* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005).

The Hero of Liao-Yang, produced by the Biograph Company in 1904, stands as one of the earliest precursors of a production cycle that the *Moving Picture World* in 1910 would label the 'Japanese invasion', referring to a number of motion pictures that satisfy the fascination of the 'occidental mind' with things Japanese or tap the 'connection, sentimental or otherwise, between the United States and Japan.'[1] However, rather than *The Hero of Liao-Yang*'s place in the broader strain of cinematic Japanophilia, it is this film's more immediate historical context that concerns me in this essay. When it was released in September 1904, this two-reel rendering of an episode from the Russo-Japanese War (1904–5) was as unmistakably topical as a daily newspaper's political cartoon, a public affairs lecture on the Lyceum circuit or a war correspondent's dispatch from the front. It is not surprising that Biograph found the Russo-Japanese War to be a marketable and readily filmable subject for a narrative two-reeler, for the early twentieth century (also the era of *Madame Butterfly* – in the form of the 1898 Long novella, 1900 Belasco play and 1905 Puccini opera) was as preoccupied with Japanese masculinity as the World War II years and the yen-never-sets 1980s.[2]

   Although the Russo-Japanese War could be said to have ushered in the twentieth century, it no longer has the symbolic resonance, much less the timely relevance, it once did, when the strategic manoeuvres and deployment of modern weaponry by Russia and especially Japan were much debated in the American and European popular press and poured over by professional military observers. Yet this war remains a remarkably rich (and largely ignored) historical site for exploring the politics of cross-cultural representation and the tangled skein of

3 Frederick Palmer, *With Kuroki in Manchuria* (New York, NY: Scribner's, 1904), p. 28. It is worth noting that Japan actively attempted to influence American perceptions of the war. See, for example, Robert B. Valliant, 'The selling of Japan: Japanese manipulation of Western opinion, 1900–1905', *Monumenta Nipponica*, vol. 29 (1974), pp. 415–38; David Wells and Sandra Wilson (eds), *The Russo-Japanese War in Cultural Perspective, 1904–05* (New York, NY: St Martin's Press, 1999); and Rotem Kowner, 'Becoming an honorary civilized nation: remaking Japan's military image during the Russo-Japanese War, 1904–1905', *Historian*, vol. 64, no. 1 (2001), pp. 18–38.

4 Early twentieth-century interpretations of the Russo-Japanese War published in the USA include Kan Ichi Asakawa, *The Russo-Japanese Conflict: Its Causes and Issues* (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin, 1904); B.L. Putnam Weale, *The Re-shaping of the Far East* (New York, NY: Macmillan, 1905); and Sidney Lewis Gulick, *The White Peril in the Far East: An Interpretation of the Significance of the Russo-Japanese War* (New York, NY: Fleming G. Revell, 1905). For more recent historical accounts of the Russo-Japanese War, see David Walder, *The Short Victorious War: The Russo-Japanese Conflict* (London: Hutchinson, 1973); Denis Ashton Warner and Peggy Warner, *The Tide at Sunrise: A History of the Russo-Japanese War, 1904–1905* (New York, NY: Charterhouse, 1974); Ian Hill Nish, *The Origins of the Russo-Japanese War* (London: Longman, 1985); J.N. Westwood, *Russia against Japan, 1904–1905: A New Look at the Russo-Japanese War* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1986); R.M. Connaughton, *The War of the Rising Sun and Tumbling Bear: A Military History of the Russo-Japanese War, 1904–5* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1988); Thomas J. Rimer, *A Hidden Fire: Russian and Japanese Cultural Encounters, 1868–1926* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1995); and

discourses in America concerning militarism, modernization and race. In this essay, I will examine how these discourses were instantiated and inflected through the particularities of *The Hero of Liao-Yang*, whose representation of Japanese masculinity is best understood against the backdrop of contemporary American accounts of what was then frequently referred to as the 'New Japan'.

The larger question posed by *The Hero of Liao-Yang* is: what stood for 'Japan' and 'Japaneseness' at the beginning of the twentieth century in the USA? More precisely, what avatar of the Japanese hero and what variety of heroic action was imaginable? How was Japan's participation in this decidedly modern war represented? By sampling a wide range of material circulating through several different media and cultural channels in the USA, including editorial cartoons and photojournalism as well as juvenile fiction and first-person accounts by renowned war correspondents, I will situate *The Hero of Liao-Yang* within a contemporary array of equally topical representations and thereby suggest how film historians might broaden the field of what we take into account when we talk about cross-cultural representation in early twentieth-century America. Of course, this foray into cultural history will inevitably be partial and beholden to the holdings of public and private archives, including the relics and junk that recirculate through eBay. Topicality is elusive and conjectural, but it cannot be ignored, especially when it comes to films designed for the commercial marketplace, where the topical is a significant attraction, a source of pleasure and a reminder of the ties that link the screen to the discourses that circulate in and comprise the public sphere.

According to acclaimed US war correspondent and novelist, Frederick Palmer, 'there never was a war at all comparable' to the Russo-Japanese War and 'never a war which drew so many foreign correspondents'.[3] In addition to Palmer's *With Kuroki in Manchuria*, 1904–5 also saw the publication of books in English by correspondents like Frederic William Unger (*Russia and Japan and a Complete History of the War in the Far East* [1904]) and Richard Barry (*Port Arthur: A Monster Heroism* [1905]), as well as a first-person account by best-selling Kentucky author, John Fox Jr (*Following the Sun-Flag: A Vain Pursuit through Manchuria* [1905]).[4] Not all of these commentators agreed with Palmer, who claimed that the Russo-Japanese War was 'the most picturesque of modern wars'.[5] Indeed, contemporary correspondents like novelist Jack London (who reported on the war for the *San Francisco Examiner*) frequently bemoaned the practical difficulties of viewing and visually rendering this conflict because of inclement weather, red tape, state censorship and what Paul Virilio would later call the 'growing derealization of military engagement'.[6] For example, Fox, a self-professed Japanophile, undertook the journey east fired by the prospect of witnessing (and then 'telling tales' of) the Japanese soldier's 'heroism, chivalry, devotion, sacrifice, incomparable patriotism; to see him fighting, wounded – and, since such things in war must be – dying, dead'. In the end, however, the best view Fox was allowed access to only revealed

Geoffrey Jukes,
The Russo-Japanese War,
1904–1905 (Oxford: Osprey, 2002).

5 Palmer, *With Kuroki in Manchuria,*
   p. 72.

6 Paul Virilio, *War and Cinema: The*
   Logistics of Perception (London:
   Verso, 1989), p. 1. In fact, Virilio's
   account of modern warfare begins
   with the searchlights used in the
   siege of Port Arthur during the
   Russo-Japanese War (p. 68).

7 John Fox Jr, *Following the Sun-*
   Flag: A Vain Pursuit through
   Manchuria (New York, NY:
   Scribner's, 1905), pp. ix, 161.

8 Palmer, *With Kuroki in Manchuria,*
   p. 82.

soundless puffs of smoke ten miles in the distance, caused by 'shells [that] were so far away that we could not tell whether they were Russian or Japanese, whether they were coming toward us or going away'.[7]

Even a much closer vantage point on the action could prove to be no less disappointing. After witnessing the Battle of Yalu from a safe spot that afforded him a privileged overview, Palmer confessed:

> Less than three hours had been occupied in a business which you had seen as a whole with panoramic fidelity ... You wanted the charge made over again, and made slower to give you more time for appreciation. You had seen the reality, and at the same time you felt a detachment from it which was at once uncanny and unsportsmanlike. The spectator had been as safe as in an orchestra chair when carnage reigns on the stage. It was as if a battle had been arranged for him and he had been taken to the best position for seeing its theatrical effects.[8]

Palmer's anxiety at occupying this prized position is here mixed with his somewhat guilty recognition that war's reality might register as merely another display of artfully arranged stage carnage. Interestingly, Palmer is equally dissatisfied with his first-hand temporal experience of war. To desire that the battle be 'made over again and made slower to give you more time for appreciation' is to dream, probably unwittingly, of a slow-motion cinematic (and aestheticized?) rendering of the combat experience.

Yet notwithstanding the complaints and misgivings of war correspondents, the Russo-Japanese War was exhaustively documented and highlighted as a top news story, a subject for illustration-filled Sunday supplement sections and a prime topic on the editorial pages of the American press, both in major metropolitan markets and far off in the provinces (see figure 1).[9] Like newspapers, general-interest magazines such as *Collier's* and *Harper's Weekly* also privileged first-hand reportage and relied heavily on visual information: photos, maps, drawings, caricatures and cartoons, all of which quite literally made the conflict 'picturesque'. These images, in turn, frequently reappeared in other venues, including lectures and various chronologically arranged illustrated histories of the Russo-Japanese War, like Richard Linthicum and Trumbell White's *War between Japan and Russia* (1904).

9 I have examined the coverage of
   the Russo-Japanese War in a
   range of US newspapers,
   including the *Brooklyn Eagle,*
   Chicago Tribune, Cleveland
   Leader, Des Moines [Iowa]
   Register and Leader, Lexington
   (*Kentucky*) *Herald, Los Angeles*
   Times, New York Times, San
   Francisco Examiner and
   Washington Post.

Figure 1
'Sensations every minute'
'The Fickle Public,' originally
published in *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*
(February 1904).

Figure 2
'Expecting an attack from Russian cavalry – alert Japanese near Tehling, Manchuria.' Stereoview card, Underwood & Underwood (1905).

At the same time, this war – and especially the Japanese side – became the subject of hundreds of different three-dimensional stereoview cards, sold in sets for home use and frequently printed in colour (figure 2). When mounted in a hand-held or tabletop viewing apparatus, the stereoview card typically offers the illusion of a tableau in depth with several receding visual planes, all arrayed before an ideal vantage point. (Two-dimensional photographic versions of stereoview images also circulated in other media, reappearing as postcards, glass stereopticon slides and magazine illustrations.) Russo-Japanese War stereoviews produced by T.W. Ingersoll, Underwood & Underwood and other firms depict troop movements, artillery, camp life, embattled terrain and details of local colour, like Koreans in native costumes, Manchurian peasants at work and architectural sites.

A quite different and perhaps even more ubiquitous medium for imaging the Russo-Japanese War was the editorial cartoon – irreverent, eye-catching and 'exaggerated' almost by definition. Cartoonists under

GETTING TIRESOME.

Figure 3
'Russia and Japan knock-about song-and-dance', *Des Moines Register* (November 1903).
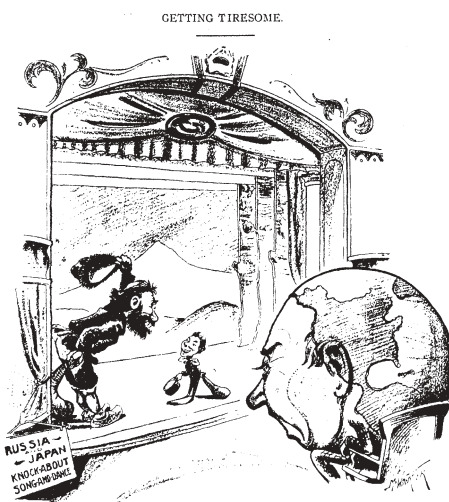
the pressure of daily deadlines caricatured Japan as earnest Lilliputian or
feisty tyke, aggressive dog or well-trained combatant, but editorial
cartoons also regularly provided a running commentary on how the
Russo-Japanese War was represented, circulated, exhibited and
perceived in the USA. The warring nations might, for instance, be
pictured as little more than a momentary diversion for a 'global'
audience, another act in the ongoing performance of geopolitics, as in a
Des Moines [Iowa] Register cartoon from November 1903, which
renders Japan and Russia as vaudeville performers ready to start a
'knockabout' song-and-dance routine, while the world in the shape of an
impatient globe looks on (figure 3).

For my purposes, the most interesting of such commentaries is a
syndicated cartoon originally run in the *Cleveland Leader* in April 1905,
fifteen months into the Russo-Japanese War (figure 4). As is frequently
the case, in this cartoon, the conflict in Asia is being enacted for an
audience that includes the US and the European powers. In this instance,
however, the Russo-Japanese War is figured not as a vaudeville turn,
circus act or boxing match, but as a moving picture show, for the caption
reads: 'Turn on the Biograph.' 'Biograph' here probably serves as a
synonym for 'moving picture machine,'[10] although, in fact, the Biograph
Company had by this date released two Russo-Japanese War films,
including what might have been its first two-reel narrative motion
picture, the fifteen-minute, fifteen-shot production, *The Hero of Liao-
Yang*. It is not clear in the cartoon whether Japan and Russia are waiting
for the Biograph camera to roll before the battle begins or the Euro-

10 Thus the *Cleveland Leader* could
write on 25 December 1904: 'the
war in the far East has been
prolific of biograph pictures
showing the evolution of troops
and flotilla' (p. 19).

11 Sidney Tyler, *The Japan-Russia War: An Illustrated History of the War in the Far East* (Philadelphia, PA, P.W. Ziegler Company, 1905), p. 282.

12 Kemp R. Niver and Bebe Bergsten, *Biograph Bulletins, 1896–1908* (Los Angeles, CA: Locare Research Group, 1971), p. 28.

13 On the crucial role of re-enactments in this period, see Kristen Whissel, 'Placing the spectator on the scene of history: the battle re-enactment at the turn of the century, from Buffalo Bill's Wild West to the Early Cinema', *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, vol. 22, no. 4 (2002), pp. 225–43.

14 Andre Gaudreault, *Cinema 1900–1906: Filmography* (Brussels: FIAF, 1982), pp. 113, 120, 230; Charles Musser, *The Emergence of Cinema: The American Screen to 1907* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1994), p. 359.

15 Joseph L. Anderson and Donald Richie, *The Japanese Film: Art and Industry* (Princeton, NJ, Princeton University Press, 1982), p. 27. Komatsu Hiroshi claims that the Russo-Japanese War 'helped the Japanese film industry make a large leap forward' because of the popularity of actualite footage as well as staged war films, both imported and domestically produced. Among the imported war films shown in Japan was *The Hero of Liao-Yang* ('Some characteristics of Japanese cinema before World War I', in Arthur J. Nolletti and David Desser (eds), *Reframing Japanese Cinema: Authorship, Genre, History* [Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1992], pp. 238–9). The fullest accounts in English of the role and reception of war footage in Japan are offered by Peter B. High, *The Imperial Screen: Japanese Film Culture in the Fifteen Years' War, 1931–1945* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 2003), pp. 3–8; and Sebastian Dobson, 'Reflections of conflict: Japanese photographers and the Russo-Japanese War', in *A Much Recorded War: The Russo-Japanese War in History and*

American spectators are waiting for the Biograph projector to fill the screen with its images: is this a matter of war on film or war for film?

Either way, it is remarkable to find as early as 1905 – barely a decade into motion picture history – so direct an acknowledgement that modern war requires the apparatus of cinema. In the following sections I will analyse what appeared on screen when the exceedingly up-to-the-minute Biograph was turned on, joining war correspondents, cartoonists and photographers in the process of making visible and narrativizing the Russo-Japanese War. More broadly, I will annotate *The Hero of Liao-Yang*, that is, attempt to account for its choices and situate it within the early twentieth-century American discourse that concerned masculinity, militarism and the New Japan.

The Battle of Liao-Yang, a key encounter midway through the Russo-Japanese War, took place from 24 August to 3 September 1904. Contemporary commentators struggled for superlatives to express the magnitude and human costs of this battle. For Americans, the Civil War came to mind. 'No fighting so fierce, so sustained, and so bloody has been experienced since the armies of Grant and Lee met in their great death grapple in the Wilderness in the Civil War', declared Sidney Tyler in *The Japan-Russia War*.[11] Less than three weeks after the battle, Biograph had completed *The Hero of Liao-Yang*. It was hardly a surprising choice of subject. Biograph's fiction films of the period frequently make use of highly topical material set in distinctive locales, like *The Moonshiner* and *The Suburbanite* (both also 1904) or, more germane, *The Nihilists* (February 1905), which was billed as a 'stirring dramatic production based on the internal troubles of Russia'.[12]

Biograph was hardly unique in exploiting the appeal of war films. As might be expected after the successful cinematic showcasing of the Spanish-American War, the Boxer uprising and the Boer War, producers and exhibitors found the Russo-Japanese War to be prime moving picture material.[13] Pathé, for instance, offered *Around Port Arthur* and the four-part *Russian-Japanese War*, and the Edison Company filmed its naval drama, the *Battle of Chemulpo Bay* (April 1904), using miniatures in its New York studio. Soon after Biograph released *The Battle of the Yalu* (April 1904), a re-enactment in four scenes, filmed at St John's Military Academy in Syracuse, New York, Edison followed with its version, entitled *Skirmish between Russian and Japanese Advance Troops*.[14]

Donald Richie and Joseph Anderson note that Japanese-produced footage of the Russo-Japanese War was screened at several sites in the USA in 1904, including the St Louis International Exposition.[15] However, the most elaborate American exhibitions of Russo-Japanese War films were mounted by popular lecturer Burton Holmes and by Lyman T. Howe's travelling moving picture shows in 1904–6. Thanks to Charles Musser's exhaustive research, we know that Howe's program on the siege and fall of Port Arthur included 18 different scenes shown in

Imagery (Boston, MA: MFA
Publications, 2005), pp. 74–80.

roughly chronological order, from the departure of a Japanese regiment
in Tokyo to the Russian surrender of Port Arthur – all complete with
what a reviewer for the *Milwaukee Sentinel* described as extensive live
sound accompaniment: 'the clanging of sabers, the rattle of musketry, the
fanfare of trumpets, the roll of the drum, the booming of cannon'.
Howe's war pictures, wrote this enthusiastic reviewer, 'can not but make
the heart of every man swell with pride and admiration' as he sees 'the
daredevil bravery of the little Japs, who surmounted inconceivable
obstacles that led to the attainment of an object and purpose staked out by
Japanese statesmanship decades ago'.[16]

16 Charles Musser with Cary Nelson,
*High-Class Moving Pictures:
Lyman H. Howe and the
Forgotten Era of Traveling
Exhibition, 1880–1920* (Princeton,
NJ: Princeton University Press,
1991), pp. 166–9, 312.

As was the case with the short films Lyman Howe strung together for
his program, the contemporary reception of *The Hero of Liao-Yang*
depended to a great extent on the specific conditions of exhibition at each
engagement (see figure 5): was this Biograph two-reeler screened, for
example, as part of a twenty-minute programme on a vaudeville bill or as

Figure 5
Advertisement for the Orpheum
vaudeville theater, ***Brooklyn***
Daily Eagle **(May 8, 1904).**

one segment in a forty-five-minute moving picture show at a church or outdoor park? Was it combined with magic lantern slides to create an educational program? Was it introduced and explicated by a live lecturer? Was it fleshed out by live sound effects? What particular type of live or mechanical musical accompaniment was performed at the screening? (For instance, one likely possibility would have been the combination or alternation of what passed for 'Oriental' or 'Japanese' music and martial music/sound effects.) Each different configuration of these variables – programming, venue and sound accompaniment – would result in a significantly different viewing experience of *The Hero of Liao-Yang*. That is also not to mention how this experience might have been affected by the behaviour and demographics of the audience for any particular screening. If this film seen today seems truncated, discontinuous or bafflingly incoherent, this is in part because *The Hero of Liao-Yang* was only fully realized and 'completed' (narratively as well as politically and ideologically) at the site of exhibition rather than the site of production.

The print of *The Hero of Liao-Yang* preserved in the Library of Congress paper-print collection contains fifteen shots: the longest is the final shot of the film (2:27 minutes), and the briefest shows a young man waving a sword (ten seconds). Unlike certain other Biograph films of this period, this print of *The Hero of Liao-Yang* includes no intertitles. The first eight shots (totalling about 5:30 minutes) comprise what I will call the home front. They are set in the quite spacious, fenced-in grounds of an estate, which includes an open-air veranda (intended to represent a tea house), a decorative pond and a small shrine. The home front shots are temporally as well as spatially continuous, although several of them (nos 1, 2, 3 and 5) could stand alone as independent vignettes:

1. A group of people (male and female, including a younger boy) all dressed in kimono (except one male dressed in a blazer, white slacks and tie) watch as one of the men is blindfolded, then all play blind man's bluff.
2. The group watches and applauds as two of the males practice kendo (figure 6).
3. On the veranda of the tea house, the group drink tea and sake.
4. A soldier arrives at the gate, delivers a letter to a man in kimono, bows, then leaves.
5. In the now-empty garden, a young man practices sword waving.
6. As the young man continues waving the sword, the hero emerges in uniform, sits on the edge of the teahouse and is handed the sword by the young man; then he is formally presented with a samurai sword by a woman in kimono. He holds it aloft and bows, then returns it to the woman.
7. The hero visits a small shrine where he washes his hands, claps and bows before the shrine, then exits the frame.

Figure 6
Kendo match

Figure 7
The final scene

Frame enlargements from *Hero of Liao-Yang* (Biograph 1904).

8. The hero re-enters the area near the tea house, moves with the woman and the younger male to the gate for a formal farewell (with bows), before he departs as they watch.

The final seven shots (totalling about 9:15 minutes) recount the hero's adventures during what we assume is the battle of Liao-Yang:

9. Amid activity at a Japanese command tent, the hero arrives and is given a written message, then departs on horseback.
10. In the field, three Japanese soldiers decamp; the hero arrives, leaves his sword and horse, then departs on foot.
11. Russian soldiers hiding in the brush surprise the hero as he approaches from the distance; after a struggle with the four Russians soldiers, he escapes; they pursue.
12. Exchanging gunfire with the Russians, the hero shoots one of his pursuers before he apparently is shot and stumbles to the ground; he shoots another of his pursuers and puts the message in his mouth before the Russians reach him; they search his clothes and boots.
13. At a medical tent with a Red Cross insignia, guarded by a Russian soldier, the hero on a stretcher speaks with a pigtailed man, who then dashes away; the hero is examined by a nurse and a doctor and is carried off on a stretcher by orderlies; the doctor checks another patient.
14. The hero is placed in a shallow grave, and the pigtailed man covers the hero's face with a cloth before he is buried by the orderlies; when the Russians have gone, the helper unearths the still-living hero, retrieves his uniform, props him up, and assists him in getting dressed; the hero staggers off alone.
15. At a Japanese battlefield command centre, officers congregate, messengers arrive on horseback and artillery is fired; finally, the wounded hero staggers in from the distance and delivers his message; he exits the frame as the artillery barrage continues while the officers gesture and scan the distance with binoculars (figure 7).

Certain aspects of *The Hero of Liao-Yang* are typical of the era. The temporal and spatial coordinates of the action are sometimes not entirely

clear: we do not know, for example, how much time passes between the ambush and the rescue of the hero, and there is no attempt to link the various battlefield scenes so as to map out a coherent space. The staging of the action and the static, distanced positioning of the camera sometimes make it very difficult even to locate the hero within the frame. Narrative information is not consistently privileged, and the temporal rhythm as scene is connected to scene does not follow the dramatic logic we might expect, particularly in the film's long final shot where the spectacle of the artillery barrage has much more weight than the wounded hero's successful completion of his mission.

To complicate matters somewhat further, there is another, more narratively coherent, Biograph version of *The Hero of Liao-Yang*, in the form of a written synopsis of the film published in the company's advertising catalogue:

> A young Japanese officer interrupted from the quiet pleasures of his home life by official notice to join his regiment at once, swears fealty to his Emperor on the sword of his ancestor, and in a characteristically unemotional way bids farewell to his wife and children. The following scenes find him at the front, where he is intrusted with a deed of desperate daring – the carrying of a message through the enemy's country to the commander of the second Japanese army. In the accomplishment of this feat he is severely wounded and captured by Cossacks, but, though seriously wounded, manages to devour the paper upon which the despatch is written. He is taken to a Russian field hospital, and there, by feigning death and with the assistance of a faithful Chinese coolie, escapes and arrives at the headquarters of the second army while the 'Battle of Liao-Yang' is raging. In the midst of terrific cannonading and shells bursting about in every direction, he hands his despatch to the officer commanding and is decorated upon the field with the emblem of highest honor in Japan, taken from the breast of the general himself.[17]

17 Niver and Bergsten, *Biograph Bulletins*, p. 218.

This synopsis explains the business with the sword in shot 6 and clarifies the role of the hero in shot 13, where he is said to 'feign' death and thus definitely is in on the escape plot, perhaps even directing the subterfuge undertaken by the character here identified as the 'faithful Chinese coolie'. The synopsis also suggests that perhaps a shot (or a final intertitle) in the print of *The Hero of Liao-Yang* is missing, since we do not clearly see the hero actually being decorated. At the same time, Biograph's written account foregrounds (and creates) a sense of the film's narrative coherence by underemphasizing shots 1, 2, 3 and 5 – tableaux that apparently illustrate the 'quiet [and not so quiet] pleasures' of Japanese home life.

In fact, the kendo match and sword waving display in these shots are quite in keeping with a non-narrative category of motion pictures that Biograph produced under the rubric of 'Views of Sports and Pastimes'. This part of this company's output included a series on 'primitive sports

18 In his authoritative Edison filmography, *Edison Motion Pictures, 1890–1900: An Annotated Filmography* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1997), pp. 144, 385–6, Charles Musser lists several Japan-themed films shot by Edison in the pre-1900 period, including the *Launching of Japanese Man-of-War 'Chitose'* and *Toyou Kichi*, featuring a Japanese juggler.

of the Indian' (wrestling, tug-of-war, horse races and so on) and such titles as *Japanese Fencing* and *Jiu-Jitsu, Japanese Art of Self-Defense*.[18] The apparently eclectic inclusiveness of *The Hero of Liao-Yang* could therefore be explained as an attempt to incorporate the range of attractions offered by several different early cinema genres: 'views of sports and pastimes', scenics, battle re-enactments and military views – all inscribed within a highly topical narrative of heroism (and Japan) triumphant.

That Japan unquestionably stands as the heroic side in this war is a crucial given in *The Hero of Liao-Yang*, even though nothing in the title of the film suggests the nationality of the hero, who could conceivably have been an interloping American or a valiant Cossack. However, this partisan perspective is not at all surprising, considering US newspaper and magazine coverage of the Russo-Japanese War. Biograph's Japanese hero may be nameless (and relatively faceless and featureless, which render his identity more a matter of his body than his physiognomy), but the first half of *The Hero of Liao-Yang* presents the hero as a man with something to leave behind, something to fight for: a place in the world, a culturally marked identity, a social position which allows for leisure activities, a home, a family, a past. Note that the 'faithful Chinese coolie' has none of these attributes of familial and class identity – attributes which demonstrate in this instance that the civilized nation of Japan merits American attention and respect.

Except for the game of blind man's bluff, the varied activities inside the spacious fenced-in grounds – complete with garden, fountain, shrine and teahouse – all signify 'Japanese-ness' in one way or another (including the fact that this Japan has room for at least one person dressed in fashionable Western attire). This cultural/familial/national constellation of objects, gestures, actions and values is why the hero does not hesitate to go off to war (although his homeland itself faces no immediate threat). If only by the *post hoc* cinematic logic of scene following scene, his life at home qualifies him to be a hero. However, since there are no causal links between what happens in the first half and the second half of the film, the experience of the home front apparently does not foster any special skills that will avail the hero when he arrives at the combat zone. Sake does not save him, nor does bowing correctly, nor does acknowledging his ancestors, nor does kendo.

Given all the markers of Japanese-ness in the first half of the film, does anything identify the protagonist as Japanese in the second half? The hero of Liao-Yang is heroic because he leaves his home to fulfill his duty to the state and then manages to complete his mission, which is to hand-deliver a message that apparently has something to do with the booming artillery that fills the film's final frame. He performs no great rescue, achieves no individual objective, undertakes no *bushido*-inspired self-sacrifice. He is trustworthy and resourceful, capable of undergoing great physical hardship, of rising from the grave to do his duty, even if that duty does not seem to have any immediate bearing on the battle of

Liao-Yang. In the end it is the Japanese artillery fire – and the officer corps directing the fire – that asserts at least a cinematic/narrative victory. In *The Hero of Liao-Yang*, Russia has no comparable technology at its disposal – and no heroes, only soldiers and medical personnel who can be easily outwitted.

Produced and released in the midst of the Russo-Japanese War, *The Hero of Liao-Yang* is notable as much for what it assumes as for what it shows about Japan, Japanese masculinity, modern warfare and the imperialist contest for control of Korea and China. This film's obvious topicality, its blending of independent attractions and continuous narrative, its fascination with the Japanese home front coupled with its celebration of Japanese prowess on the battlefield all point toward a broader, though hardly uniform, discursive terrain, around 1904. *The Hero of Liao-Yang* is best understood, I propose, as one strand in a web of representations and one episode in a rather complex story that the United States – from the sidelines, yet with a vested interest in the Pacific – told itself about Japan, Russia and modern warfare. The Russo-Japanese War fixed Japan, which was already undeniably an object of curiosity and desire, even more prominently and regularly under the gaze of Americans. For the rest of this essay, I will follow this gaze outward from *The Hero of Liao-Yang* to certain interrelated aspects of early twentieth-century discourse in the USA concerning armed and effective Japanese masculinity.

The resourceful hero who proves his mettle on the battlefield in Biograph's 1904 film takes his place in a gallery of publicly circulated photographs, realistic drawings, stereoviews and caricatures of the Japanese soldier, including poignant illustrations of the soldier's farewell

to beloved or family; informal snapshots of men in groups at ease near the front; portraits of heroically posed officers; photographs of troops deployed in military manoeuvres; graphic drawings of hand-to-hand combat and suicidal assaults; stark images of corpses and casualties; and editorial cartoons that render the soldier as diminutive belligerent or skeletal figure of death (figure 8).[19] Encoding national, gender and racial identity, these images underscore the ubiquitous presence of the victorious (or soon-to-be victorious) Japanese soldier in the US mediascape, and in different ways they situate Japan in relation to a technologized modernity, position the Japanese soldier in the contested Asian terrain, and provide an Other to Japan in the form of Western war correspondents, Russian soldiers or civilians. These images enact, implicitly or explicitly, the cross-cultural distance between East and West (or, more specifically, between Japan and the USA), between brown/yellow/coloured masculinity and white masculinity. We might also say that each image of the Japanese soldier provides an answer to what increasingly became the crucial question posed by the Russo-Japanese War: how to account for Japan's string of impressive victories? Or, in the more direct vernacular of an editorial cartoon from the *Cleveland Leader*: 'Why the Japs Win' (figure 9). Was it a matter of valiant fanaticism, modern military tactics, the assistance of the Chinese or the expertise of an experienced officer corps composed of latter-day samurai? This *Cleveland Leader* cartoon answers the question by showing the face of a young soldier, etched with words that name the

19 There was also a tradition of live theatrical and carnival performances in the USA by men identified as Japanese: firemen, magicians and, especially, acrobats. The upscale Keith vaudeville theatre in Cleveland even featured as its headline attraction in December 1904 the live appearance of 'a genuine detachment of Japanese soldiers, picked representatives of the Imperial Army of the Mikado'. According to a promotional notice, the twenty-one soldiers 'perform a number of remarkable military evolutions and conclude their act by a mimic representation of the attack upon Port Arthur' ('Jap Soldiers at Keith's', *Cleveland Leader*, 25 December 1904, p. 19).

WHY THE JAPS WIN

Figure 9
Syndicated cartoon, originally in
***Cleveland Leader* (March 1904).**

(essentially Japanese?) qualities that guarantee his nation's victory: patriotism, strategy, skill, bravery, fatalism and determination.

These qualities similarly apply to Biograph's hero of Liao-Yang, except perhaps for 'fatalism'. Neither does *The Hero of Liao-Yang* foreground the 'fanaticism', which, according to correspondent Richard Barry, leads the Japanese soldier to 'dash valiantly' and unhesitatingly onto the 'griddle of death'.[20] 'Fatalism' (read as a willingness to face death) and 'fanaticism' (read as a sort of fervent fatalism, enacted on the battlefield) both figure in the discourse, often quite explicitly. Cameras were rarely, if ever, able to capture the close-quarters combat at Port Arthur or Liao-Yang, but illustrators filled the breach with action-filled tableaux showing hand-to-hand fighting, bayonet attacks and corpse-filled trenches, as in a drawing entitled, 'In the Russian Trenches', which shows a bearded, white-suited Russian being overwhelmed by a frenzied Japanese bayonet charge (figure 10). Such drawings frequently accompanied purportedly first-hand accounts, like this description from Sidney Tyler's *The Japan Russia War*:

> the struggle was carried on with an amount of fury to which there is no parallel in history. The Japanese dashed forward with the bayonet like madmen, and in serried columns, in which the shells made terrible furrows. Every time they reached the Russian lines horrible mêlées, in which even the wounded fought to the death, took place. No quarter was given. Pairs of corpses were found clinging to each other, the teeth of the men being buried in their adversaries' throats and their fingers in their eyes as they had expired.[21]

Such horrific charges could occur and, more important, could succeed, the argument ran, because of the Japanese Way of Death, which almost made the nation invincible and provided an explanation of sorts for the 'madness' Tyler describes. Along with accounts of frenzied assaults and selfless

20 Richard Barry, 'Hell at Port Arthur,' *Everybody's Magazine*, vol. 12 (April 1905), p. 436.

21 Ibid., p. 308.

Figure 10
'In the Russian Trenches', Sidney Tyler, *The Japan Russia War* (Philadelphia, PA: P.W. Ziegler Company, 1905).

valour, there are also representations in books, newspapers and magazines of severely wounded or dead Japanese soldiers, littering the battlefield, being given medical attention or funeral rites. Such images testify not only to the cost of modern warfare and maybe even to a submerged Euro-American desire to see a rising Japan un-manned, but also to a belief that Japan's victory comes from its 'Oriental' fatalism and what B.L. Putnam-Weale in *The Re-Shaping of the Far East* claimed to be 'a calm disregard for death . . . a fixity of purpose and an unruffled patience that have seldom been equaled and certainly never surpassed in the entire course of the world's history'.[22] (*Madame Butterfly*, of course, provides a variation on the same theme.) While the bravery and 'death' of Biograph's hero of Liao-Yang looks to be very much in keeping with a preoccupation of the larger discourse (i.e. Japanese heroes willingly face, even embrace, death), his actions suggest less fatalism than resourcefulness and purposefulness in accomplishing his mission. In the film it is enough that he is indirectly associated with *bushido* through the prominence of the sword in home front rituals and athletic displays. On the battlefield, he is not called upon literally or figuratively to commit state-sanctioned *seppuku*.

It is revealing in this context to contrast *The Hero of Liao-Yang* with a subgenre of highly topical popular fiction from this period that also explicitly exalts Japanese military heroism: juvenile adventure novels like Kirk Munroe's *For the Mikado, Or a Japanese Middy in Action* (1905) and Herbert Strang's *Kobo: A Story of the Russo-Japanese War* (1905). These books unequivocally celebrate a particular sort of heroism they offer as typically 'Japanese' – a heroism doubly meriting admiration from US readers because in each case the professional Japanese military hero dies a suitable and highly efficacious death after inspiring his Western protege.

Both the Japanese hero of *For the Mikado*, Takemitsu Matsu, and the novel's young American protagonist, Dun Brownleigh, are enrolled at the US Naval Academy, where they quickly become steadfast friends, help the Navy win the big game against the Army (Matsu's jiu-jitsu skills conveniently come in handy on the football field), then rush off to serve the Mikado as soon as war is declared. After being captured and escaping, resisting mutinous Chinese 'coolies', stealing a Russian submarine and sinking an enemy destroyer, they face their final test at Port Arthur. Blockading the mined harbour is

> Admiral Togo's mighty fleet of battle-ships, cruisers, destroyers, hospital-ships, colliers, repair-ships, and transports, lying quietly at anchor, with banned fires, but in readiness for instant action . . . everywhere over the placid surface darted launches and dispatch-boats; everywhere were signs of ceaseless activity without a trace of confusion; and over all proudly floated the sun-rayed banner of Japan, the new world-power of the Orient.[23]

This striking celebratory tableau of ascendant Japanese militarism still, however, requires an individual act of self-sacrifice to be complete. So

22 Putnam Weale, *Re-Shaping of the Far East*, II, p. 155.

23 Kirk Munroe, *For the Mikado, or A Japanese Middy in Action* (New York, NY: Harper & Brothers, 1905), p. 243.

young Matsu, true to his unswerving patriotism, dies for Japan by crashing a miniature submarine into a sunken Russian battleship. At the funeral for this heroic martyr, Matsu's casket is draped with the flags of both the USA and Japan, signifying the 'bonds of closest sympathy' between the 'the most western nation of the world and its most eastern.'[24]

Like the swordplay scenes in *The Hero of Liao-Yang*, Munroe's lovingly detailed accounts of jiu-jitsu and other Japanese martial arts connect to a substantial discursive strain: advertisements and how-to articles, cartoons, descriptions of Japanese wrestling and kendo, coloured photographs of archers and swordsmen in traditional attire, and instructional books like Harry Skinner's *Jiu-Jitsu* (1904). Such texts define Japanese masculinity above all in terms of the disciplined, untechnologized, even archaic body, animated by the power and persistence of *bushido* in twentieth-century Japan. The key book in this regard is *Bushido: The Soul of Japan*, Inazo Nitobe's often-reprinted 'exposition of Japanese thought' in English, which first appeared in 1905. 'Bushido,' claims Nitobe, 'was and still is the animating spirit, the motor force of our country'. Nowhere is this more evident than on the battlefield:

> what won the battles on the Yalu, in Corea [sic] and Manchuria, were the ghosts of our fathers, guiding our hands and beating in our hearts. They are not dead, those ghosts, the spirits of our warlike ancestors. To those who have eyes to see, they are clearly visible. Scratch a Japanese of the most advanced ideas, and he will show a samurai . . . the summons of the present is to guard this heritage.[25]

Bushido: The Soul of Japan thus testifies to the causal link between Old and New Japan that was only implied by *The Hero of Liao-Yang*, where the protagonist's battlefield exploits followed but were not in any direct way guided or animated by the 'spirits' he pays homage to in the first half of the film.

'Why the Japs Win' is actually answered in two ways in *The Hero of Liao-Yang*: through narrative, in the actions of the hero, and through spectacle, in the final image of a Japanese artillery bombardment. As I have suggested, the presence of archaic rituals and swordplay during the first part of the film evokes a broader American discourse about martial arts, *bushido* and samurai values. The hero's participation in a decidedly modern war effort when the film moves out of Japan to the combat zone – and, in particular, the film's final image – likewise connects to a much more expansive discourse, in this case involving not the Japanese soldier per se, but the sophisticated Japanese military machine, designed and equipped for twentieth-century combat.[26]

The relevant early 1900s material on what I will call the Japanese war machine is vast, encompassing print journalism, postcards, stereopticon slides and stereoview cards. One prominent source for information and images was *Collier's Magazine*, a high-circulation, general-interest

24 Ibid., p. 213.

25 Inazo Nitobe, *Bushido: The Soul of Japan, An Exposition of Japanese Thought* (New York, NY: G.P. Putnam's, 1905), pp. 171, 188–9. For a later, quite literal rendering of the animating ghost of the samurai father, see *The Secret Game* (1917), a star vehicle for Sessue Hayakawa, concerning a Japanese spy in the USA.

26 R. M. Connaughton catalogued the evidence of the Russo-Japanese War's particular modernity, pre-dating World War I: 'trench warfare, barbed wire, minefields, searchlights and flares, machine guns, tethered observation balloons, radios, telephones, and railways to deliver soldiers, supplies and material' (*War of the Rising Sun*, p. 74).

weekly that featured reports from the front and in-depth photographic coverage in virtually every issue during the Russo-Japanese War. While the war was still in progress, *Collier's* rushed into print its folio-sized *The Russo-Japanese War: A Photographic and Descriptive Review of the Great Conflict in the Far East*, a 'pictorial history', based on information provided by the magazine's 'indefatigable representatives at the front', including well-known war correspondents like Richard Harding Davis, Frederick Palmer and James H. Hare.[27] That same year *Collier's* published *Japan: Her Strength and Beauty*, a photographic celebration of 'the recreated, the new Japan', while an even more extensive collection from *Collier's* appeared in 1905, under the title, *A Photographic Record of the Russo-Japanese War*.

The first of *Collier's* volumes on the war begins with a set of images notably absent from *The Hero of Liao-Yang*: individual portraits of the Emperor and Japan's military leaders in full regalia, all appropriately serious, formally posed and never made to look archaic or non-Western. Notwithstanding these photographs of the top brass, *Collier's Russo-Japanese War* does not primarily focus on high-ranking officers or, for that matter, on heroic soldiers. It is Japan's 'military organization' that most impresses *Collier's*. Image after image corroborates what the written text explicitly declares, demonstrating that the Japanese forces are vastly superior to their Russian opponents: superbly equipped, more mobile, more 'agile' and, above all, better prepared as a result of the 'almost microscopic exactness with which every possible contingency had been foreseen and provided for'.[28]

Collier's vision of the Japanese war effort is echoed across a number of other books, like B.L. Putnam Weale's two-volume *Re-Shaping of the Far East* (1905), which marvels at the 'perfection of the Japanese military machine'. 'Hand in hand with the passage of the Yalu came other Japanese moves', Weale writes, 'each one careful and deliberate to despair, but withal synchronising so admirably that the feeling of a relentless machine moving pitilessly down on them possessed all Russian commanders, and exercised a moral influence of the most convincing kind'.[29] Similar points are stressed in Tyler's illustrated history of the war, which sees throughout the Japanese advances on land and sea the workings of a 'splendid machine', 'directed by one uniform purpose and striving towards one great common end', carrying out its strategic goals 'with almost machine-like regularity and precision'.[30] The Japanese soldier, from this perspective, is best understood as 'a perfectly working factor of the great machine-like army in whose pride he is a unit'.[31]

The majority of *Collier's* images document this Japanese military machine in relentless operation, moving men and supplies, occupying territory, maintaining all-important lines of communication, caring for casualties, conducting funeral rites, constructing bridges and making effective use of Korean labour. 'Boatload after boatload of these little [Japanese] soldiers with their inscrutable, unimpassioned faces' were landed in Korea, the caption to one photo declares, with everything in

27 Richard Harding Davis and A. T. Mahan, *The Russo-Japanese War: A Photographic and Descriptive Review of the Great Conflict in the Far East* (New York, NY: Collier's, 1905), p. v.
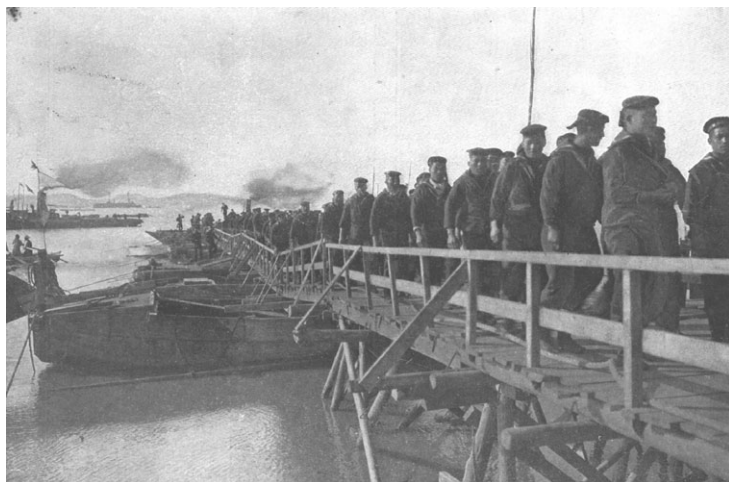
28 Davis and Mahan, *The Russo-Japanese War*, p. 25.

29 Putnam Weale, *Re-Shaping of the Far East* II, pp. 164, 125.

30 Tyler, *Japan-Russia War*, pp. 204, 208, 203.

31 Frederic William Unger, *Russia and Japan and a Complete History of the War in the Far East* (Philadelphia, PA: World Bible House, 1904) p. 313.

'perfect order'. Indeed, the greatest compliment that a *Collier's* correspondent can offer is that the Japanese army's march through Korea 'has been as smooth and orderly as that of a British column in India, the organization as efficient in every way' (see figure 11). At the same time, *Collier's* preference for panoramic, deep-focus photographs renders the disputed territory itself as vast and depopulated, a seemingly 'empty' field on which the Japanese military can be deployed. When this magazine turns to the Koreans and Manchurians, these 'inscrutable and unimpassioned' Asian 'peasants' are invariably seen not as utterly dedicated, efficient soldiers, but as non-modern and 'apathetic' bystanders, further underscoring Japan's privileged status vis-a-vis the nations of the West.[32]

With only a handful of performers allotted to each image and no diegetic explanation of Japanese military strategy, *The Hero of Liao-Yang* evokes none of the mechanistic efficiency and grand systemic order that *Collier's* sees in the Japanese war effort. Instead, the film's figuration of Japan's twentieth-century-styled military power comes from its concluding image of an extended artillery barrage, which fills the frame with smoke. Lacking the deep-focus clarity of *Collier's* photographs, the final image of *The Hero of Liao-Yang* could be taken to signify the technological might of the New Japan, even as this image hints – perhaps unintentionally – at the impossibility of visualizing modern warfare. Turning on the Biograph leads ultimately to a smoke-filled screen in which the visible markers of traditional Japanese masculinity, so strikingly evident in the first half of the film, have disappeared or been subsumed by the powerful munitions of the New Japan.

While Biograph's hero of Liao-Yang proves to be adept with a revolver (in a shoot-out that closely resembles scenes from other period films, like *The Moonshiner* and even *The Great Train Robbery* [1903]),

32 Davis and Mahan, *The Russo-Japanese War,* pp. 41, 35, 61, 66.

he has no wartime need for the samurai sword or cutlass that figure so centrally as cultural props on the home front. What he absolutely requires, however, is the assistance of a Chinese coolie to help him pull off his escape from the obtuse Russians, who always seem to outnumber him. Rising after being buried alive is an ingenious ploy – a piece of Orientalized magic and adventure story pluck. At the same time, this escape allegorizes rather transparently one view of Asian geopolitics: Japan, with the necessary assistance of China, remains more than a match for Russia. The implications of this superiority on the battlefield and this intra-Asian collaboration haunt much of the Russo-Japanese War discourse, including, but not limited to, abiding anxieties in the Euro-American West concerning the Yellow Peril's looming threat.

Surveying the prospect of impending combat in the fall of 1904, correspondent David Fraser pondered the future:

> as yet I could not see horse, foot, or artillery. But within range of sight they lay to the number of well nigh half a million men – some busy at their guns, others marching into position, many at their stations. The magnitude, the significance of the issues which this scene suggested, almost paralyzed the mind. The concentrated energy of two great races was here collected to contend, the one part against the other, for supremacy. At stake was the destiny of the Orient.[33]

For contemporary observers like Fraser, there was little chance of underestimating the 'magnitude' of the Russo-Japanese War. The question was how to assign appropriate 'significance', sufficient symbolic weight, to this world-altering struggle – a struggle frequently understood to be at once a clash of civilizations, an unprecedented bloodbath, an auspicious or ominous reveille for the twentieth century and a racial conflict with global implications. In accounts of this decidedly modern war, what part was assigned to Japan? Perhaps surprisingly, Trumbell White begins his 1904 book, *War between Japan and Russia: The Complete Story of the Desperate Struggle between Two Great Nations with Dominion over the Orient as the Tremendous Prize*, by asking whether 'it be Russia or Japan that is fighting on the side of occidental civilization'. This is not simply a rhetorical question. White reasons that, while Japan may not be a Christian nation, 'the spirit of the Island Empire is stirred to freedom, justice, enlightenment, advancement'.[34] Read from this angle, New Japan is the latest avatar of political liberalism and the Enlightenment and so emerges as the standard bearer of the occidental in the war against uncivilized – albeit Christian – Russia.

Writing in *Harper's Weekly* in March 1904, a month into the Russo-Japanese War, Charles Johnston was less sanguine about whether Americans appropriately 'appreciate the significance of the New Japan.' 'Appreciating' for Johnston meant duly acknowledging the power and potential imperialist influence of Japan in the Pacific and beyond (see figure 12). Anything less, and we – Americans, the West, whites – would

33 David Fraser, *A Modern Campaign, or War and Wireless Telegraphy in the Far East* (London: Methuen, 1905), p. 298.

34 Linthicum and White, *War between Japan and Russia*, pp. 29, 27. Similarly George Keenan, special correspondent for *Outlook* magazine, asked: 'Which is the civilized power?' (*Outlook*, vol. 78 [29 October 1904], pp. 515–23).

only be imperiled by our own blindness, falsely secure in our now-discredited faith in what Johnston calls 'white supremacy'. For Johnston, the 'universal significance' of the ongoing war was abundantly clear: Japan 'is the first Asian power thoroughly to master the modern science and mechanism of war'. Such mastery only was possible because the New Japan combined the lessons of Prussian militarism with its own highly efficient 'power of organization', its 'endless energy', its elite class of officers – latter-day 'samurai' – and its deeply masculinist, 'entire exclusion of the imaginative and emotional nature, of all the softer elements of life'.[35] Johnston's striking vision of a proto-fascist Japan would, after 1905, figure more prominently in the discourse, corresponding to and fuelling a growing anxiety about the supposedly tangible threat that Japan was poised to engage the USA in a potentially apocalyptic race war.[36]

Yet for all the references to the *Yellow* Peril and to Nippon's 'little *brown* soldiers', the racial identity of the New Japan could be gauged not only in terms of this nation's non-whiteness, but also in terms of its relative homogeneity. Indeed, the much-noted racial 'purity' of Japan was sometimes cited as one explanation for Japanese military success. Frederick McCormick, for instance, concludes his two-volume *Tragedy of Russia in Pacific Asia* by claiming that Japan's victory was the triumph of a homogenous race over the 'heterogeneous and conglomerate' Russia, with its vastly inferior army drawn from 'peasants in Europe and Asia, even

35 Charles Johnston, 'The strength of Japan', *Harper's Weekly*, vol. 48 (26 March 1904), pp. 462–3.

36 See, for example, two of the many future war scenarios, Homer Lea, *The Valor of Ignorance* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1909); and *Banzai!*, a novel translated from the German and serialized in the *Washington Post*, May–June 1909, as well as films like Kalem's *The Japanese Invasion* (1909) and Imp's *The Peril* (1912).

37 Frederick McCormick, *The Tragedy of Russia in Pacific Asia* (New York, NY: Outing Publishing, 1907), p. 389.

38 Tyler, *Japan-Russia War*, p. 246.

39 Fox, *Following the Sun-Flag*, pp. 157–8.

Chinese and "Siberians"'.[37] From one perspective, New Japan could thus represent an unattainable ideal for white Americans residing in a racially mixed (if segregated), increasingly 'heterogeneous and conglomerate' nation – an ideal made even more compelling given 'the fierce, almost fanatical fervor of their [Japanese] patriotism', their expansionist aims, and their *bushido*-inflected modernity.[38] At the same time, like Biograph's hero of Liao-Yang, New Japan could be seen as bound to but not bound by the homeland, its military success coterminous with the traditional pastimes and filial rituals of an age-old patriarchal culture.

It would in some respects have been much easier for Western eyes if Japan at the dawn of the twentieth century were vanishing rather than increasing in geopolitical prominence and thus were more akin to the celebrated-in-passing Native American – that is, if the Japanese Way of Death somehow meant the death of Japan in a literal working out of Theodore Roosevelt's notion of 'race suicide'. Yet through the sacrifices of its heroes, New Japan gained territory and international stature, and much of the highly topical material I have referred to in this article – from stereoview images to juvenile fiction – suggests that armed and assertive Japanese masculinity was not simply newsworthy for American audiences, but admirable in death as in life.

Thus, without ever actually witnessing any combat during his months as a war correspondent, John Fox Jr still felt bound to confess that

> as far as I can make out at long distance, the Japanese army and the individual Japanese soldier seem the best in the world; the soldier for the reason that he cares no more for death than the average Occidental for an afternoon nap – the army for the reason that the Buschido [sic] spirit – feudal fealty – having been transferred from Daimio and Samurai to Colonel and General – gives it a discipline that seems perfect.[39]

Through the frustrating, anti-climactic travels recounted in his aptly titled memoir, *Following the Sun-Flag: A Vain Pursuit through Manchuria*, Fox never gets any closer to an individual Japanese soldier. Yet his vision of unseen Japanese masculinity as superior, disciplined, purposeful, energetic and ego-less is simply too compelling for Fox to give up, for it is at once a purified alternative to and a portent of the end of the Occidental.

Although Fox never succeeds in coming face-to-face with Japanese masculinity, as he ventures into Asia, looking futilely for his own hero of Liao-Yang, one sight in particular sticks with him, making him shudder with a deep recognition of the stakes of the Russo-Japanese War:

> We had a shock and a thrill to-day . . . a few carts filled with wounded Japanese passed slowly by. In one cart sat a man in a red shirt, with a white handkerchief tied over his head and under his chin. Facing him was a bearded Japanese with a musket between his knees. The man in the red shirt wearily turned his face. It was young, smooth-shaven and

white. The thrill was that the man was the first Russian prisoner we had seen – the shock that among those yellow faces was a captive with a skin like ours. I couldn't help feeling pity and shame – pity for him and a shame for myself that I needn't explain . . . Blood is thicker than water – or anything else – in the end.[40]

40 Ibid., pp. 117–8.

Chasing the sun-flag across Manchuria brings Fox not merely disappointment, but shame so obviously warranted and appropriate that it needs no explanation. Apparently, Fox's self-professed Japanophilia is reason enough.

The Hero of Liao-Yang – with its own share of Japanophilia – contains no such visual (and visceral) moment of race awareness, when a glimpse of whiteness throws all else into perspective. I doubt that it would have been possible, under any screening conditions, to see an unbridgeable racial gulf between yellow and white registered this tangibly in *The Hero of Liao-Yang*. Biograph's hero is unambiguously gendered and repeatedly marked as a cultural and national subject, but he is not overtly raced, not designated as 'coloured' by an explanatory intertitle or a hand-tinted image, by an unmistakable application of brownface or by a closer shot that reveals the features of the actor. So we are left with two apparently contradictory possibilities: firstly, literalized brownness would be superfluous since the hero's race is implied by the fact that he is marked culturally as Japanese, in which case race is synonymous with culture; and secondly, the absence of colour makes the nameless Japanese hero of Liao-Yang, by default or by intention, white, and – therefore? – that much more unproblematically heroic.

Attempting to identify, contextualize and interpret the topicality of *The Hero of Liao-Yang* requires that we explore the rich, varied, pervasive and historically specific discourse in the USA concerning the Russo-Japanese War in particular and Japanese masculinity more generally. At the Asian edge of the Pacific in the midst of this war, John Fox Jr finds wounded, weary whiteness, captive to the New Japan. Meanwhile, the Biograph Studio in New York City produces and releases *The Hero of Liao-Yang*, *Collier's* offers its weekly illustrated dispatch from the front, Underwood & Underwood distributes more stereoviews, and the *Cleveland Leader* runs another editorial cartoon. Working through such texts we can map a network of interconnected concerns that help to explain the early twentieth-century USA's heightened interest in the New Japan: the ascendance of a new-yet-old militarism, the power of national masculinity, the efficacy of modernization and the significance of racial identity and racial purity. The conjunction of these concerns can vary significantly from text to text, even month to month, reflecting the vagaries of topicality and the complexity of issues at stake when Japan loomed large for American audiences. An awareness of this cultural history helps us recognize and explain the particular evocation of Japaneseness, the absence of colour as racial marker and the journey of

heroic Japanese masculinity from home front to smoke-filled battlefield in *The Hero of Liao-Yang*.

Walking into and out of the spectacle: China's earliest film scene

LAIKWAN PANG

Early cinema has attracted much scholarly attention in recent years for two reasons in particular. First, the new forms of representation introduced by cinema engendered an exciting period of experimentation, one which indirectly illuminates our understanding of the recent emergence of new media. Second, early moviegoing has been considered a cultural activity that reflects the quintessential verve and vertigo of modern urban life. However, the study of early Chinese cinema finds itself at odds with these two academic drives, largely because of the lack of extant film texts and related cultural information. None of the Chinese films made in the first seventeen years survives in its complete form – the earliest Chinese-made film available to us is *Laogong zhi aiqing/Labourer's Love* (Zhang Shichuan, 1922), which does not represent the earliest attempts by Chinese filmmakers to handle the new medium.[1] Historical information related to moviegoing as a cultural activity is also scarce. The combination of these two lacunae has made detailed study of the first decade of Chinese cinema almost impossible.

However, in making a comprehensive study of China's cultural modernity it is not possible to leave this earliest film scene unexamined. Even in the West the number of extant early films is small – as Simon Popple and Joe Kember comment: 'Without a wide range of contextual knowledge, the small fraction of early films that still survive are of limited value'.[2] The main scholarly concern of the second approach to early cinema studies is more the relevant cultural contexts and concepts than the films themselves. While there are other scholars discussing the production of the first films in

1 Zhen Zhang does try to rely on this film, however, to examine the 'primitive mode' of Chinese cinema, studying it as a 'last echo of an early cinema'. See her 'Teahouse, shadowplay, bricolage: *Laborer's Love* and the question of early Chinese cinema', in Yingjin Zhang (ed.), *Cinema and Urban Culture in Shanghai, 1922–1943* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999), pp. 27–50.

2 Simon Popple and Joe Kember, *Early Cinema: From Factory Gate to Dream Factory* (London: British Film Institute, 2004), p. 33.

3 Many of these scholars focus on the relationship between Peking Opera and the first Chinese films, which are a direct recreation of the opera performance. Examples include: Zhen Zhang, 'Teahouse, shadowplay, bricolage', pp. 32–5; Jubin Hu, *Projecting a Nation: Chinese National Cinema Before 1949* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2003), pp. 30–5, 38–9; Mary Farquhar and Chris Berry, 'Shadow opera: towards a new archaeology of the Chinese cinema', *Post Script*, vol. 20, nos 2/3 (2001), p. 25; Yeh Yueh-yu, 'Historiography and Signification: music in Chinese cinema of the 1930s', *Cinema Journal*, vol. 41, no. 3 (2002), p. 83; Zheng Junli, 'Xiandai Zhongguo dianying shilüe' (A brief history of Chinese cinema), in *Jindai Zhongguo yishu fazhen shi* (Modern Chinese Art History) (Shanghai: Liangyou tushu, 1936), reprinted in Zhongguo dianying ziliao guan (China Film Archive) (ed.), *Zhongguo wusheng dianying* (*Chinese Silent Cinema*) (Beijing: Zhongguo dianying chubanshe, 1996), pp. 1388–9; Cheng Jihua, Li Shaobai and Xing Zhuwen, *Zhongguo dianying fazhen shi* (*The Development of Chinese Cinema*) *Volume I* (Beijing: Zhongguo dianying chubanshe, 1981), pp. 13–15; Li Suyuan and Hu Jubin, *Zhongguo wusheng dianyingshi* (*History of Chinese Silent Cinema*) (Beijing: Zhongguo dianying chubanshe, 1996), pp. 13–16; Hongshi, 'Ren Qingtai yu shoupi guochanpian kaoping' (Evaluations of Ren Qingtai and the first Chinese films), *Dianying yishu* (*Film Art*), no. 2 (1992), pp. 82–3.

4 Leo Ou-fan Lee, *Shanghai Modern: the Flowering of a New Urban Culture in China 1930–1945* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), p. 85.

5 There were only a handful of accounts written in the nineteenth century that reported on actual film viewing activities. I find it interesting that most of the popular magazines I have read, including *Youxi zazhi*, *Yuxing* and *Funü shibao*, discuss a wide range of popular cultural activities of the time but contain no accounts of

China,[3] this essay is concerned with questions of film reception: when cinema was first introduced to China, how did the new images interact with the spaces designated for screening movies, and how was this new form of spectatorship connected to the overall modern visual culture on the one hand and the social class of the viewers on the other? I am particularly interested in the concept and experience of 'movement', which I believe provides a pertinent perspective from which to study the relationships between space, vision and subjectivity, also revealing the tensions and dialogues between traditional and modern cultural environments in which the first screenings of movies acquired their cultural meanings.

Records of the earliest years of Chinese cinema are most akin to an oral history. Chinese film scholars have tried in vain to unearth documents that reveal how cinema first came to China. Almost all the information we have about the earliest phase of Chinese cinema comes from personal memories. There were no magazines or newspapers specifically about cinema until the 1920s,[4] and I have found little information about the first two decades of Chinese cinema in major cultural magazines or writings before the 1920s.[5] I have to admit that, in spite of my wishful thinking as a film historian, cinema was just not that popular with the Chinese masses in the first two decades of its appearance.[6] Cinema culture in China did not fully develop until the 1920s, which explains why most studies of early Chinese cinema focus on this period. As I will demonstrate, cinema in its formative years in China was featured as one of the many modern visual entertainments available to the leisured classes, and its attraction was based as much on its connection with other new visual entertainments as on its unique representation system, which film theorists currently tend to emphasize.

Most of the documentation about the earliest Chinese cinema activities appeared in newspaper advertisements. On 18 January 1896, Hong Kong's *Huazi ribao* (*Chinese Letters Daily*) included an advertisement for 'several hundred fantastic stories from the West' to be shown in the colony's Old Victoria Hotel.[7] An advertisement printed in *Shenbao* (*Shanghai Daily*) on 10 August 1896 publicized a foreign *yingxi* (shadow-play, the earliest word for film in Chinese) that was to be screened in the teahouse Youyicun (Another Village) of Shanghai's Xu Yuan (Xu Garden) the following day. According to the advertisement, the films were screened in conjunction with a variety of other activities taking place in the garden, including magic, fireworks and lantern riddles. However, neither of the advertisements provided any other information about the films. As these are the earliest extant film advertisements known, most scholars assume the two events to be the first film screenings in Hong Kong and China, respectively. The records kept by Lumière of its first world tours give no indication of any stops in China,[8] and we cannot be completely sure who made the films that were advertised or who brought them to China. However, there are records of an American named James Ricalton, who exhibited a programme of

cinema. Obviously, despite my
discussion here, motion pictures
were marginal and insignificant in
urban China at the turn of the
twentieth century, which seems to
explain the difficulty of
reconstructing this period of
China's film history.

6 See two writings in the 1920s
commenting on the initial failure
of moving pictures to become
popular in Shanghai and in
Beijing: Guan Ji'an, 'Yingxi shuru
Zhongguo hou de bianqian'
(Changes in moving images after
entering China), *Xi zazhi* (*Play*),
inaugural issue (1922), reprinted in
Zhongguo dianying ziliao guan
(ed.), *Zhongguo wusheng
dianying*, p. 1313; and Xiao,
'Beijing dianying shiye zhi fada'
(The development of Beijing's film
industry), *Dianying zhoukan* (*Film
Magazine*), no. 1, (1921), reprinted
in Zhongguo dianying ziliao guan
(ed.), *Zhongguo wusheng
dianying*, pp. 176–7.

7 Yu Muyun reprints the
advertisement in his *Xianggang
dianying shihua* (*History of Hong
Kong Cinema*), vol. I (Hong Kong:
Ciwenhua, 1996), p. 6.

8 Jay Leyda, *Dianying: Electric
Shadows: an Account of Films and
Film Audience in China* (Boston,
MA: MIT Press, 1972), pp. 1–3.

9 Ibid., p. 2. The advertisement was
printed in *Shenbao*, 27 July 1897.

10 Yu Muyun, *Xianggang dianying
shihua*, p. 13.

11 Ye Longyan, *Rizhi Shiqi Taiwan
diaying shi* (*The History of
Taiwanese Movies during the
Japanese Colonization) (Taipei:
Yushanshe, 1998), p. 43.

12 Li Suyuan and Hu Jubin, *Zhongguo
wusheng dianying shi*, p. 3.

13 Li Qingyue, *Ningxia dianying
shihua* (*Historical Account of
Ningxia Cinema*) (Yinchuan:
Ningxia renmin chubanshe, 1995),
p. 1.

14 Li Suyuan and Hu Jubin, *Zhongguo
wusheng dianyhing shi*, p. 17.

15 Yu Muyun, *Xianggang dianying
shihua*, p. 37.

16 Zhang, 'Teahouse, shadowplay,
bricolage', p. 32. However,
Zhang's documentation is slightly
misleading, as Hongkew was not
the first theatre in China but only
the first in Shanghai. Song Weicai

Edison films in Shanghai in 1897 and is believed to have been the first to make films in China.[9]

According to the research of film historians – such as Yu Muyun on Hong Kong cinema, Ye Longyan on Taiwan cinema, Li Suyuan and Hu Jubin on films shown in Beijing and Shanghai and Li Qingyue on those in Ningxia – the earliest film screenings in Chinese cities were staged in a variety of places, including a Cantonese opera theatre,[10] a government guest house,[11] a public garden[12] and a palace.[13] Early movie screenings were a highly mobile affair; apart from simple equipment such as a projector and screen, all that was needed was an empty space and some chairs. The various spaces chosen for the screenings tell us more about the specific exhibitors and audiences involved than about the essence of film screening as a unique cultural–social activity. The diversity of spaces used for the first screenings shows, unsurprisingly, there was no inherent way for cinema to be received in China. Cinema was not a homogenized cultural activity until more than a decade later, when specific venues were designed and built for film screening: Ping'an dianying gongci (the Arcade Theatre) was built on East Chang'an Road in Beijing in 1907,[14] Bizhao dianying yuan (Bizhao Theatre) opened on Graham Street in Hong Kong in the same year,[15] and one year later Hongkou daxiyuan (Hongkew Theatre) was built in Shanghai.[16] All three theatres were backed by foreign investment and were modelled after western movie theatres, but for the first decade film screenings in China all took place in temporary spaces, which were mostly arranged contingently and whose design held little direct relationship with film screening. It would be a mistake, however, to argue that the viewing sites did not relate to film screening in any discursive way, since space and the activities carried out in that space are always mutually conditioned. Examining why certain sites were chosen to screen movies and how the viewing activities transformed those sites yields interesting insights into the practices of, and the cultural values given to, early cinema. In what follows I focus specifically on the public garden, one of the most popular sites in urban China at the turn of the twentieth century, to investigate how the space, with its own cultural specificities, influenced and was influenced by cinema. The cinematic activities were in dialogue with other activities in the new garden culture, and the mutual influences among cultural forms were largely anchored in their visual elements.

Documenting the first film screening activity in China, Zhen Zhang writes, 'On 11 August 1896, the first projection by some French showmen took place in the Xu Yuan teahouse in Shanghai'.[17] Zhang's account is slightly misleading, as Xu Yuan was not a teahouse but a public garden, and the actual film screening was shown in the Another Village teahouse inside Xu Garden. I need to emphasize the difference between the garden and the teahouse because Zhang's analysis, one of the very few English-language works to explore China's earliest film scene, was largely based on the space of the teahouse, through which she contrasts the exterior theatrical space with the interior cinematic space. While the teahouse is

suggests that the teahouse-theatre Panorama was the first movie theatre in China, because it was remodelled in 1912 to accommodate film viewing. This is also incorrect, since the Arcade opened for business in 1907, and its advertisements can be found in major newspapers of the time. Song Weicai, 'Zhongguo zaoqi dianying shichang lüekao' (A brief study of China's early film market), *Dangdai dianying* (*Contemporary Cinema*), no. 120 (2004), pp. 53–5.

17 Zhang, 'Teahouse, shadowplay, bricolage', p. 32.

18 Mingzheng Shi, 'From Imperial gardens to public parks: the transformation of urban space in early twentieth-century Beijing', *Modern China*, vol. 24, no. 3 (1998), p. 225.

19 Cheng Xuke and Wang Tao, *Zhongguo yuanlin zhi* (*Gardens in China*) (Shanghai: Shanghai shehui kexueyuan chubanshe, 2000), p. 3.

20 Ibid., pp. 707–27.

21 Ibid., p. 75.

22 John Kasson demonstrates how Coney Island reflected a new urban culture fostered by the rise of the American middle class, who desired more expressive and exciting activities. John Kasson, *Amusing the Million: Coney Island at the Turn of the Century* (New York, NY: Hill and Wang, 1978). Kathy Peiss furthers Kasson's study and demonstrates that Coney Island was also frequented by the working class, arguing that Coney Island embodied a subtle debate over whether the middle class or the working class dominated the unfolding of the new entertainment culture. Kathy Peiss, *Cheap Amusements: Working Women and Leisure in Turn-of-the-Century New York* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1986), pp. 115–38.

23 Wang Tao, 'Hai qu yeyou, fulu, zhuan shang', (1878), p. 9, reprinted in Wang Tao (ed.), *Yanshi congchao* (Taipei: Guangwen shuju, 1976), pp. 616–17.

24 Xiong Yuezhi, 'Zhang yuan: Wanqing Shanghai yige gonggong

definitely an important space in the development of Chinese cinema, neither Chinese nor western scholars have thus far offered any close analysis of the relationship between cinema and the public garden, which hosted many of the earliest film screenings in China (although often in their teahouses). Zhang's sole emphasis on the interior space of the teahouse prevents us from analysing the larger space of the garden, in which cinema interacted with the other cultural activities held there.

Gardens in Imperial China had always been private and reserved for the elite, while ordinary people visited folk fairs held in the grounds of Buddhist or Daoist temples or other places of worship. As Mingzheng Shi argues, 'the concept of the public park, where common people can go for relaxation and recreation, is purely western and modern'.[18] The first public garden in China was built in 1868 in the British–American Concession in Shanghai, when the colonial administration transformed a piece of barren land into a public park modelled after those in western countries.[19] However, these gardens were built for the leisure of the Concession's foreign residents; the Chinese were not allowed to enter.[20] Shen Yuan (Shanghai Garden), established in 1882, was the first public garden opened to the Chinese, but unlike a western public park it was owned privately and run for profit.[21] The Shanghai Garden was an instant success, and the number of such public parks mushroomed in the following years to include Zhang Yuan (Zhang Garden), Yu Yuan (Yu Karden), Bansong Yuan (Garden in the Middle of the Song River) and the aforementioned Xu Garden, where the first film screening in China allegedly took place. These gardens were modern fairgrounds, but unlike New York's Coney Island, which attracted the working and middle classes,[22] the Chinese grounds were more upmarket and fashionable, frequented by courtesans, businessmen and the literati. Beyond the garden's historical affiliations with the elite, there was also a racial component to the parks' social status. Since the first 'public' gardens in China were created specifically for foreigners, when locals started to join in modern public garden life, the gardens maintained an elitist aura that is absent in public gardens of the USA, for example.[23] These Chinese gardens were the site of many leisure activities, ranging from the traditional, such as attending flower exhibitions, watching operas, dining and gambling, to modern visually oriented entertainments such as slide shows, dog or horse racing, or watching hot-air balloons. Zhang Garden, for example, hosted the first electric light show in China on 6 October 1886.[24] Some of the earliest commercial photography studios in Shanghai also operated in these gardens, including Xu Garden's Yuelairong, which opened in 1888.[25] These public gardens continued as Shanghai's most fashionable haunts until the 1910s, when a number of indoor entertainment complexes were built in the downtown area to accommodate the latest entertainments, including movies, within a single high-rise building.[26] The public gardens, in vogue for just two decades, gradually lost their cultural edge in the early 1920s, and soon became leisure sites for the masses.[27]

kongjian yanjiu' (Zhang garden: a study of a public sphere in late Qing Shanghai), in Zhong Zhongli (ed.), *Zhongguo jindai chengshi qi ye, shehui, kongjian* (*Modern Chinese Urban Institutions, Society and Space*) (Shanghai: Shanghai shehui kexueyuan chubanshe, 1998), pp. 342–3.

25 Cheng Xuke and Wang Tao, *Zhongguo yuanlin zhi*, p. 79.

26 Laikwan Pang, 'Magic and modernity in China', *Positions: East Asia Cultures Critique*, vol. 12, no. 2 (2004), pp. 299–327.

27 Luo Suwen, *Shanghai chuanqi: wenming shanbian de zeying 1553–1949* (*Shanghai Legends: a Profile of Civilization Changes, 1553–1949*) (Shanghai: Shanghai Renmin chubanshe, 2004), pp. 370–71.

28 See Maggie Keswick, *The Chinese Garden: History, Art and Architecture* (London: Academy Editions, 1986).

29 Xiong Yuezhi, 'Zhang yuan', p. 339.

30 Ma Xulun recounts that during the first years of the twentieth century, when he was in his late teens, he often went to Zhang Garden to listen to open lectures delivered by famous intellectuals such as Zhang Binglin and Cai Yuanpei. Ma Xulun, *Wo zai liushisui yiqian* (*Me Before I was Sixty*) (Shanghai: Shenhu shudian, 1947), p. 22.

31 Mei Lanfang and Xu Jizhuan, *Wutai shenghuo sishi nian* (*Forty Years of Life on the Stage*) (Beijing: Zhongguo xiju, 1987), pp. 130–32.

32 Xiong Yuezhi, 'Zhang yuan', p. 339.

Visiting exquisite gardens had traditionally been a popular pastime of the Chinese literati, who held wine parties, wrote poems, played music and appreciated 'nature' in the form of man-made miniature mountains and rivers; in other words, gardens were where the Chinese practised culture.[28] The garden could become an exclusive symbol of ideal traditional Chinese aesthetics partly because gardens were privately owned and built, so that only the most affluent, such as Imperial family members or high officials, could shape and participate in this culture. Allowing public access to the garden was revolutionary and made possible by the arrival of foreign powers and consumer culture. Zhang Garden, for example, was privately owned by a British businessman, whose sudden colonial wealth had allowed him in 1872 to turn a large piece of farmland into a private garden featuring both Chinese and western architecture. After several changes of hands, it was finally purchased by the entrepreneur Zhang Shuhe and opened to the public.[29] While gardens in general still signified an upper-class lifestyle and elite culture, visitors to these new public gardens experienced modern entertainment with its sensory, and particularly visual, impact. Various public gatherings, political and cultural, also took place in these gardens,[30] and of course traditional operas were also performed there. Mei Lanfang's very first performance in Shanghai took place not in a theatre but at a private function in Zhang Garden, and the great success of this show marked the beginning of Mei's successful international career.[31] If the traditional Chinese garden contained the essence of traditional culture, these new public gardens served a similar purpose, but incorporated not only an accumulation of past tradition but also people's fascination with the modern, which was available for their instant gratification.

Although many of the new parks were created from existing private gardens, the revolutionary Shanghai Garden, as multifunctional commercial amusement park, was a completely new concept. To hold more visitors in a limited space, the gardens had to be redesigned and reconceptualized accordingly. While the modern amusement park followed a pattern similar to that of the traditional Chinese garden in compartmentalizing space to accommodate the predesigned scenery, the layout of the new parks had to be designed more efficiently while still conveying a sense of leisure. For example, in transforming the Zhang Garden from a classical private garden to a public one, the owner Zhang Shuhe built the Arcadia Hall, a multi-storey tower that could allegedly hold over one thousand people.[32] The new park had to create the sense of freedom not of physical movement but of imagination.

To further illustrate this argument, I return to the aesthetics of the traditional Chinese garden, which is often described as a three-dimensional painting. As art historian Yang Hongxun states:

> The art of garden building is similar to painting on canvas or paper in that it frequently employs such principles of compositional

33 Yang Hongxun, *The Classical Gardens of China: History and Design Techniques* (New York, NY: Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1982), p. 70.

34 R. Stewart Johnston, *Scholar Gardens of China: a Study and Analysis of the Spatial Design of the Chinese Private Garden* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 49.

35 See Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *The Railway Journey: the Industrialization of Time and Space in the 19th Century* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1986); Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven Rendall (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1988), pp. 111–14.

arrangement as spacing, distance, light and shade, and coloring. The difference is that while painting is done with inks and pigments on a flat surface, gardens are built on a three-dimensional plan in space.[33]

Just as the experience of reading traditional Chinese paintings is conditioned by the movements of the viewers' eyes, movement in space is also essential to the aesthetics of traditional Chinese gardens. A core aesthetic principle of the Chinese garden is the orchestration of constantly changing images created by the walking subject. As R. Stewart Johnston states, 'As in the Chinese painting, the principal element of the garden was the strong spatial structure formed by the patterns of movement'.[34] In a traditional garden the walking routes are carefully planned and controlled, so that strollers are guided along a specific path and directed to stop at different points to take in the view. Although walking in a traditional garden was not a realization of true freedom of movement, it had still been a defining experience, whereas in the new public parks physical movement was almost entirely replaced by imaginary movement, with certain exceptions such as bicycling. As if to catch up with the accelerated speed of capitalist life, the new garden experience had to pick up the pace, but it achieved this by replacing bodily movement with various forms of visual entertainment, including motion pictures. Walking only functioned as a connection between one spot and another; visitors were encouraged to station themselves within the confines of an auditorium, instead of walking around the park, to experience this new sense of 'freedom'.

The changing garden experience in China can be compared with two other modern activities, train travel and shopping, to illustrate how the new visual culture was part of a new concept of 'movement'. Many have argued that nineteenth-century industrialization entreated the subject to map the external world in radical new ways. The most frequently cited example of this is the railway, which provided a novel visual experience composed of fleeting images and panoramic perceptions made possible only by the invention of machines.[35] This aesthetic of moving vision was not entirely foreign to the premodern Chinese, who, as I have demonstrated, developed their traditional garden aesthetics around the visual experiences created by the dynamics between walking and standing still. The major structural difference between the running images provided by the railway and those in a classical Chinese garden is the position of the subject. While in the Chinese garden it is the movement of the walking subject that produces the visual experience, in the train the viewing subject is seated in a carriage and motionless. In other words, the traditional garden stroller can pause, retreat, walk at different speeds, and watch the adjacent views relatively freely, unlike the train passenger or the new garden visitor, who is stationed in a confined space, with no control over the views.

The culture of shopping also creates a new moving visual experience, in ways both opposite and similar to that created by the railway. Instead

36 Anne Friedberg, *Window Shopping: Cinema and the Postmodern* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1993), pp. 36–7.

of being entrapped by a moving object, the shoppers walk around static displayed goods, which are positioned and decorated in such a way as to guide the consumers' movements and carry their fantasies. Anne Friedberg argues that the shopping culture which developed in Europe in the nineteenth century provided the female shoppers, or *flâneuses*, with a new sense of freedom through physical and psychological movement.[36] This new mobility of the *flâneuse* can be compared with that of the visitor to the new Chinese garden. The female consumer is actually trapped between freedom and immobility, as although she is given the *privilege* of movement, *freedom* of movement is a fiction; she moves according to the logic of consumer society, and through her movement she herself is transformed into an object of the gaze, subtly woven into the capitalist system. Similarly, the new garden visitor's movement is highly structured by the new consumer culture and conditioned by the stasis of the new entertainment forms. Both the shopper and the garden visitor move in order to be surrounded by visual stimulations, structurally not dissimilar to the train passenger. Dialectically, in contrast to the immobility conditioned by the various enclosures, it is imaginary motion that charges the new subject – whether train passenger, shopper or garden visitor. If, traditionally, Chinese people visited gardens for the visual experience taken in during movement, the entertainments of the new gardens allowed a distorted continuation of this legacy by giving the perception of freedom through visual experience.

Of the many western entertainments incorporated in these new amusement parks, the motion picture is emblematic of the new form of mobility. The new railway vision is often compared with the experience of watching movies, as a sense of movement is achieved by sitting still. In nineteenth-century consumer culture, the careful arrangement of goods on display allowed the stasis of the objects to create a new range of imaginary mobilities. The underlying mechanisms, according to Friedberg, foretold the emerging cinematic experience.[37] Cinema, in other words, is emblematic of modernity's visual dimension largely due to its seizure of an immobile subject via its moving images.

Both walking in the traditional gardens and the moviegoing experience in the new amusement parks produce the imaginary effects of travelling, but their underlying mechanisms and the responses generated are very different. The old and the new parks both embark on a representational tactic of visualizing 'other spaces' within a confined environment. The traditional Chinese garden – owned and patronized by the rich – worked to claim and rebuild nature. The motion pictures shown in the modern amusement park similarly brought images of imported 'modernity' to entertain large numbers of the general public. Yet the forms and mechanisms of representation are different. In the traditional garden, the miniature version of nature is clearly not the same as the original, but rather involves an artistic process of modification; in contrast, the projected movies are mechanically reproduced images that are faithful to reality and supposedly involve no human manipulation. Therefore, while

37 Ibid., p. 38.

the movements in the traditional garden are real and those in the movie house are imaginary, the opposite is true of their representations: the nature reexperienced in the traditional garden is fantastic, yet the images projected in movies are 'realistic'. The cinematic apparatus helps bring the object of desire directly before us without transforming it or taking it from its original context, whilst our actual physical movements have to be restrained and replaced by those of machines that capture and re-present the images to us.

The new image-movement structure of modern visual culture has been widely criticized in recent scholarship. The kind of movement produced by cinematic machines and the new modern visual culture forbade any touching or personal examination of the object. As Paul Virilio argues, everything 'I see' should in principle be within my reach, which marks 'I can'. Yet with the mediation of so many optical devices in the modern world, the bulk of what we see is no longer within our reach, which prevents us from getting closer to the 'productive unconscious of sight', something the surrealists once dreamed of in relation to photography and cinema. We the modern viewers are also condemned to a state of visual dyslexia, unable to comprehend the visual information we receive every day.[38] Jonathan Crary argues that modern visual culture individuates and immobilizes the viewing subjects,[39] while Don Slater criticizes the excessive and overwhelming stimuli of the spectacle, which eventually confirms the vulnerability of the viewer.[40] Many visual-studies scholars argue that modern mechanically reproduced movements deprive viewers of a direct tactile relationship with the object, and that the movements generated produce an insurmountable distance between the object and the subject, which might end up confirming the radical 'otherness' of the represented to the viewer. Yet are there other dimensions of the new visual culture that might cultivate a more engaged viewing? Vision, whether or not it is connected to the sense of touch, is our primary means of reaching and confronting others, and we could engage with vision in such a way as to recognize the fluidity of the self-other boundary and therefore to constantly interrogate the subject-object relation in the visual structure.[41] Although cinema introduces an irreducible distance between the representation and the viewer, there might be other possibilities of movement breaking boundaries conceptually and physically. While I have demonstrated the transformation of the actual physical movements in traditional Chinese gardens into the imaginary/fictional movement provided by the new parks, I do not wish to label the modern garden visitor as essentially vulnerable and immobile. One way to question this theorization of the 'pacified modern viewer' is to examine whether the viewing context allows the viewing subject other kinds of movement with which to engage with representations and other people in the same space. The concept of public experience is important here, as many visual studies scholars, from Virilio to Crary and Slater, focus on the viewer's 'private' experience of modern visual culture. I believe that the new modern viewing subject is as much active as passive, as much collective

38 Paul Virilio, *The Vision Machine* (Bloomington and Indianapolis, IN and London: Indiana University Press and British Film Institute, 1994), pp. 7–9.

39 Jonathan Crary, *Suspensions of Perception: Attention, Spectacle, and Modern Culture* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2001), p. 74.

40 Don Slater, 'Photography and modern vision: the spectacle of "natural magic"', in Chris Jenks (ed.), *Visual Culture* (New York, NY and London: Routledge, 1995), p. 230.

41 See Stuart Hall, 'The spectacle of the "other"', in Stuart Hall (ed.), *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices* (London: Sage, 1997), pp. 225–78.

as individuated. The ways in which the subject interacts with others can tell us more about the specificity of the historical viewers, discouraging us from universalizing them as passive and empty subjects.

Early cinema should not be characterized as an independent or isolated visual experience in China, particularly in light of its garden environment. The new public garden was a venue simultaneously incorporating many different visual entertainments. This plurality of activities taking place within and around the screening sites renders the relationship between subject and spectacle more complex, and reveals the limitations of focusing solely on the teahouse to study early film reception in China. This 'publicness' can be analysed by focusing on two aspects of the new garden culture: the connections between different forms of visual experience in the garden, and the mutual transformation of the viewer and the viewed.

Very few records of early cinema reception in China are available to us, but those that are offer a glimpse of how Chinese people first responded to moving images. One report, printed in *Qubao* (*Fun News*) in 1898, documented a screening of fourteen short films in Xu Garden.[42] We do not know exactly which films the author had seen, but judging by the titles of the films most of them were actualities or short comic scenes. Beyond the titles, the author wrote only that the 'characters were so real that they would walk out of the screen when summoned' (*huzhi yuchu*). Another report, found in *Youxibao* (*Newspaper of Leisure*) in 1897, in which a first-time moviegoer more elaborately described a film show he had seen in Qi yuan (Strange Garden), detailed his feelings of shock and amusement after watching these actuality films.[43] This is widely considered to be the first documentation of the earliest film viewing in China. The author begins his essay thus:

> There was an electric light shadow-play from the USA, with magical effects beyond anyone's expectations. Yesterday evening was breezy. After the rain, some friends and I went to the Strange Garden to watch the show. When all the viewers had been seated, the lights were turned off. All of a sudden we saw an image of two western women dancing . . .[44]

This introduction can be compared with another *Shenbao* piece from 1896, which reported another attraction in the same Strange Garden: a huge painting from the USA depicting its Civil War. The author describes his visit in a similar tone:

> Two days before the mid-autumn festival, it was rainy, but not too cold and not too hot. In the afternoon, I received an invitation from the host of the Strange Garden, and I then walked to the garden with some friends. The attendant brought us into the [indoor] space. We walked past a small hallway, and it was dark. Suddenly there was a tiny beam of light, and we saw a staircase. We walked up and entered a bright environment, and there we saw two armies fighting . . .[45]

42 Anonymous, 'Xuyaun jiyouxu' (Narrating the visit to Xu Garden). *Qubao* (*Fun News*), 20 May 1898. Reprinted in Cheng Jihua et al., *Zhongguo dianying fazhen shi*, p. 9.

43 Anonymous, 'Guan meiguo yingxiji' (Watching American shadow plays), *Youxibao* (*Newspaper of Leisure*), 5 September 1897. Reprinted in Cheng Jihua et al., *Zhongguo dianying fazhen shi*, pp. 8–9.

44 Ibid.

45 Anonymous, *Shenbao*, 20 September 1896. Quoted by Chen Pingyuan and Xia Xiaohong, *Tuxiang wangqing*, p. 310.

46 *Dianshizhai*, zhong 6 (Shanghai: Dianshizhai huabao, 1884–1897). Reprinted in *Dianshizhai huabao* (*Dianshizhao Pictorial*), vol. 42 (Guangzhou: Guandong renmin chubanshe, 1983), p. 42.

Coincidentally, both authors went to the Strange Garden for a visual show on a rainy day in early autumn (albeit one year apart). Both the authors describe the trip leading them to the space before they begin to detail the actual images. One can think of this as a literary convention, in that these two reports are both modelled on traditional travel writing, but this convention becomes particularly interesting when one considers that both writers highlight the indoor space and the threshold of darkness before the images appeared, as both the trip and the darkness described had the effect of isolating the images from the writers' everyday reality. Although we do not know which films the 1897 *Youxibao* viewer watched, fortunately we do have a *Dianshizhai* lithographic representation of the American painting that the 1896 *Shenbao* reporter saw (figure 1).[46]

Although the caption states clearly that it is a painting, the lithograph does not show the frame. The painting is so big that it engulfs all the viewers (standing inside the railing at the lower left-hand corner), so that it is not the representation but the 'reality' of the war itself that the viewers experience. I note that the painting was an American work, presumably painted in the realist style that most epic paintings adopted at the time. However, the lithographer did not, or could not, re-create its realist style – the painting reproduced here was drawn in the Chinese lithographic style of the time, resulting in the reception space and pictorial space being rendered in the same way, further reinforcing the impression that the representation and its reception were within the same sense of reality. In fact, the caption not only describes the frozen

moment of the pictorial representation but also provides some hint of narrative:

> The bombs hit some [of the soldiers] whose blood and flesh were all over the place. Some soldiers were shot and they lay ossified on the ground. Some just saw a wall and hid behind it, while some ran away because they knew they were losing the battle (*You zhongpao er xueru fenfeizhe, you shoudan er jianbo yudizhe, you fangweiqiang erjinzhe, you yinbeinü ertaozhe*).

This passage suggests a series of causal relationships and the progression of time: the soldiers took refuge behind the wall because they had happened to bump into it; some escaped because they were losing and afraid. These interpretations are supplied by the creator of the lithograph. The viewers in the reception space are also rendered as if they are actively responding to the sight. This spectacle is presented in this *Dianshizhai* pictorial more as an ongoing reality or a stage performance than as a still picture, perhaps echoing the motion picture that was introduced around the same time.

In fact, the 'realist effect' is also emphasized in the two aforementioned writings on the Strange Garden. The *Youxibao* writer wonders if he has actually entered the scenes he is seeing (*guanzhe zhici jiyi shenruqizhong*), and the *Shenbao* writer exclaims that it was so heartrending for him to witness the brutality that he almost had to stop looking several times (*shangxin canmu jiburenguan*). This overwhelming effect on the viewing subjects might explain why both writers highlighted the dark passages that came before as a rhetorical device that stressed the separation between spectacle and reality. The light that came from the darkness described in the two writings is not the same as the 'Enlightenment' that visual theorists relate to modern visual apparatus; it is more like the light of a spectre, introducing an alternative reality to the viewer. The writers' emphasis on the line between the two spaces is thus a self-protective mechanism.

If both the essays and the lithograph could be seen as the viewers' subjective reflections on the visual experience, the film and the painting featured in the Strange Garden share a 'spectacular' and 'alternative' status, although one comprises moving images while the other is a still image. In both cases, while the spectacular dimension of the visual representation is highlighted, the authors emphasize their own movement into the spectacle. This creates two effects. First, the images are cut off from reality, as if the spectacular dimension had a minimal effect on the writers' actual lives. Second, their movement into the spectacle implies their autonomy and control, as if they consciously experienced it as a leisure activity. In both cases, the destructive effect of the spectacles on the viewers seems to be less than is typically assumed by western theorists of visual culture.

In fact, this complex relationship between the representation and the viewer's everyday life makes it problematic to apply current theories of

47 According to Tom Gunning and some film historians, cinema before 1906 was dominated by actuality films with exhibitionist aesthetics. These films introduce cinema as visual attraction, and their ways of communication are more presentational instead of representational. See, for example, Tom Gunning's 'An aesthetic of astonishment: early film and the (in)credulous spectator', in Linda Williams (ed.), *Viewing Positions: Ways of Seeing Film* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1995), pp. 114–33; and Gunning's '"Now you see it, now you don't": the temporality of the cinema of attractions' *Velvet Light Trap*, vol. 32 (1993), pp. 3–12.

48 Cheng Jihua et al., *Zhongguo dianying fazhan shi*, p. 9.

49 Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections* (New York, NY: Schocken, 1969), pp. 235–7; Siegfried Kracauer, *Theory of Film: the Redemption of Physical Reality* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997), p. 48.

50 Cheng Jihua et al., *Zhongguo dianying fazhan shi*, p. 9.

early cinema (based on the western culture) to non-western experiences. While people in the West reexperienced their own everyday life in these actuality films, the Chinese might have received western-made images in profoundly different ways. According to the 'cinema of attractions' theory,[47] what captured an American audience watching a view of an American street in film was not the images as such but the cinematic apparatus. However, most Chinese viewers were not familiar with the foreign images they saw onscreen. The 1897 *Youxibao* reporter describes the moving images he saw in the Strange Garden thus:

> The electric lights are like tall candles. The cars moving along the street combine to become a swimming dragon. So many people walk around it looks as if cloth is being woven. . . . Viewers were so elated that their eyebrows rose and their faces rapidly changed colour.[48]

Both Walter Benjamin and Siegfried Kracauer argue that cinema creates an alienating effect by reconfiguring familiar sights into unfamiliar patterns and forcing viewers to give these sights new meanings,[49] but the Chinese viewer quoted above did not reexperience a familiar incident or process; instead he was exposed to images he had never seen, and what impressed him, contrary to the 'cinema of attractions' theory, was as much the representational process as the referent itself. As mentioned above, the ritual of passing through a dark passage had the effect of separating cinema from everyday life. Viewers had been prepared to confront the fantastic images, and the passage helped them to rationalize the alternative reality presented in the theatrical space. Cinema, therefore, was a space of foreignness and the images had a different, probably less real and less shocking, effect on Chinese viewers than they had on western viewers.

The viewers' interpretations of the image is therefore particularly important, in that it demonstrates their ability to come to terms with these spectacles, instead of just being passively immersed in them. The 1897 *Youshibao* article, for example, shows how the author conceptualizes this viewing experience. He concludes his article thus:

> Suddenly the lights came back on, all phenomena vanished (*hu dengguang yiming, wanshi jumie*) . . . Between Heaven and Earth, things change constantly. Life is a mirage; isn't it the same as these moving shadows?[50]

If the darkness of the theatre represents the threshold to an alternative reality, the brightening of the room reintroduces the viewers to their familiar environment. This anonymous spectator chooses to rely on the traditional Buddhist/folk concept of *wanshi jumie* to interpret a novel, and somehow alienating, experience imported from the West, so that he can retreat safely to a familiar system of thinking, and therefore into a protected subject position, which the film had perhaps disturbed. One interesting contradiction revealed here is that, while the writer tries to separate the filmic reality from his own with the threshold of darkness, he

ultimately uses the concept of *wanshi jumie* to link reality and representation, exclaiming that these changing images are in fact reflections of a deeper reality. Yet I would argue that this painstaking attempt to link the two realities actually highlights the boundary between them, as they cannot be connected without recourse to the traditional Chinese notion of ultimate cosmic order. As was the case in many other countries, modernity descended on China along with a new visual discourse, but the viewer should not be seen as a passive and involuntary receptacle for such images. In this case, the writer both highlights and rejects the connection between the film and his reality, and reaches the implicit conclusion that, after all, there is no need to take the overwhelming effects of the image too seriously.

If the film viewer was indeed not passive even within the viewing of the spectacle, his or her ability to move around and out of the spectacle more clearly demonstrates the limitations of regarding the modern viewer as immobile. Returning to the screening sites mentioned earlier, the Xu Garden was widely known as a major public garden in Shanghai at the time, but there seems to be little information about the Strange Garden. I have not found it listed as a public garden in any studies of Shanghai's public gardens of the time. The caption on the *Dianshizhai* lithograph indicates that the Strange Garden was located west of the Muddy Town Bridge on Grand Avenue in the British Concession (*ying damalu nichengqiao xi*), but does not include any more information about the history of, or activities held in, this Strange Garden. According to the aforementioned 1896 *Shenbao* report on the American Civil War painting, the Strange Garden was a temporary lodge built expressly to show this painting. A poem of the time describes the Strange Garden as a teahouse adjacent to a famous racetrack, and many visitors came to the Strange Garden to watch horse racing:

> Spring horse racing is a tradition.
> In the West merchants would gamble heavily on the races.
> . . .
> The Grand Avenue in the British Concession is wide.
> Tens of thousands of people are crowded onto the Muddy Town
>   Bridge.
> To avoid the crowds,
> one can pay three pence to watch from the little western-style building.
> . . .
> With flowers from foreign lands pinned in their hair,
> those western ladies dress pleasantly, with veils over their faces.
> Bell ringing and both wheels spinning fast,
> they pass through the masses on their bicycles.
> Drinking tea on the top floor of the Strange Garden,
> people dress nicely and sit in the way they feel most comfortable.
> If you want to be a fashionable person, you have to watch closely
> with a pair of gold-rimmed glasses on your nose.

51 Anonymous, *Shanghai chunsai zhuzhici* (*Spring Folk Poems of Shanghai*) (publication details unknown), collected in Chen Wuwo (ed.), *Laoshanghai sanshinian jianwenlu* (1928) (*My Thirty Years of Life in Old Shanghai*) (Shanghai: Shanghai shudian, 1997), pp. 101–2. The poem is also collected in Chen Pingyuan and Xia Xiaohong, *Tuxiang wanqing*, p. 298.

52 Although we do not know exactly when this poem was published, Xia Xiaohong estimates that it was written around 1898, as indicated by the contemporaneous issues mentioned. Xia Xiaohong, 'Wanqing Shanghai saima yihua' (Anecdotes of Late Qing Horse Racing in Shanghai), *Xungeng* (*Root Exploration*), vol. 5 (2001), p. 100.

53 There seems to have been more than one Strange Garden in Shanghai at the time. Chen Wuwo documented two opium parlours in the International Concessions also named Strange Garden (Chen Wuwo, *Laoshanghai sanshinian jianwenlu*, pp. 11–12). We can be quite sure this Strange Garden is the same one housing the American Civil War painting in 1896, as both the *Shenbao* writing and the *Dianshizhai* caption indicated its location as being near the Muddy Town Bridge of the Grand Avenue in the International Concession. However, I cannot be entirely sure if the Strange Garden described in the 1897 *Youxibao* featuring the moving picture was the same one, although the Strange Garden described in *Shenbao* and *Dianshizhai* was clearly suitable for film screening, and *Youxibao*'s Strange Garden was clearly not one designed specifically for film screening. Since the two Strange Gardens documented by Chen Wuwo are opium parlours, it is extremely unlikely that they showed films.

54 Mei Yinsheng, 'You Zhang yuan shikuai shuo' (Ten happiness of visiting the Zhang Garden), collected in Chen Wuwo, *Laoshanghai*, p. 91.

Daiyu and Langfen walk in beauty and fame.
Their horse-drawn carriages change from day to day.
. . .
Briefly watching several races among those nice horses,
they whipped their own horses and went to the Zhang Garden.[51]

These lines are part of a long poem that depicts a horse race in Shanghai during the last few years of the nineteenth century.[52] The poet recounts that the activity attracted the attendance of many new urbanites, including fashionable courtesans and foreign ladies. This Strange Garden, which housed motion pictures, the American Civil War painting and many exciting horse races, is part of an elaborate culture of 'watching'.[53] As shown in this poem, the visitors are watching both the horse racing and each other, particularly the beautiful courtesans (Daiyu and Lanfeng) and foreign ladies, who themselves are highly mobile, riding either in their beautiful carriages or on bicycles.

This elaborate culture of watching is emphasized by the gold-rimmed glasses mentioned in the poem. In fact, another writer documenting the activities in the Zhang Garden also refers to glasses to describe the author's experience of watching motion pictures:

> One night I went [to the Zhang Garden] to watch moving pictures. I am nearsighted and forgot to bring my spectacles. Luckily a friend lent me his telescope so that I could watch the film closely. How happy I am.[54]

The other Zhang Garden attractions described in the essay include the aforementioned Arcadia Hall, snooker, fireworks, female performers, delicious Chinese and western meals, bicycles and Russian acrobats. Once again, the moving picture is part of this elaborate entertainment culture, and it is particularly sited within a new visual culture, signified by imported visual apparatus such as glasses and the telescope. The telescope carried by the writer's friend indicates that visitors went to the garden to watch not just moving pictures but other visual entertainments, like fireworks, female performers and acrobats. The cultural meanings of motion pictures in their formative years in China must be understood within this larger visual culture of the garden, which was more or less connected by the same lenses through which the viewers watched the many spectacles on display.

This garden culture can be compared with early cinema in the West. Many film scholars have reminded us of the active nature of early western audiences, which should be understood as different from the contemporary passive and spellbound film audience absorbed by the narrative. Jean Châteauvert and André Gaudreault have pointed out that the tremendous amount of uncontrolled noise created in the screening environment was one of the most obvious features that distinguished the earliest silent cinema from its second phase, when the sound environment

55 Jean Châteauvert and André Gaudreault, 'The noises of spectators, or the spectators as additive of the spectacle', in Richard Abel and Rick Altman (eds), *The Sounds of Early Cinema* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2001), pp. 183–91.

56 Miriam Hansen, *Babel and Babylon: Spectatorship in American Silent Film* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991), pp. 93–101.

57 Chinese cinema would soon move into a larger mass culture entering the twentieth century, which is a topic beyond the scope of this paper.

was regulated by the presence of lecturer, music and various filmic mechanisms.[55]

Miriam Hansen celebrates audience participation in early cinema as active, vocal and resembling participation in the public sphere instead of in consumer culture.[56] Hansen is particularly interested in the class and ethnic signification of this type of spectator behaviour, which constantly invites the 'discipline of silence' from the mainstream middle class. Whereas Hansen might be said to run the risk of romanticizing the 'democratic' potential of the lower classes, whose noise and unruly behaviour challenges the hegemony of the bourgeoisie, the Shanghai's garden culture, where the viewing environment is also highly kinetic, is clearly not a lower-class pastime. As mentioned earlier, the actual mobility of the viewers challenges the typically pessimistic understanding of the vulnerability of the viewing subject encircled by modern spectacles, but such activities are not associated with the lower classes, so we cannot easily idealize these movements as politically subversive. With the lack of relevant documentation, we know nothing of the actual intercourse of Chinese viewers within the audience hall, so we cannot comprehensively reconstruct the 'public' nature of the screening space, but this new Shanghai film culture belongs to the upper classes, who came to the public garden to see as well as to be seen. Visitors were proud to be part of the new entertainment culture, and their ability to move in and out of the spectacles should be understood as a manifestation of their pride in their newly acquired modern identity as an upper-middle-class privilege. The association of films and the elite culture through the garden was a short-lived one,[57] yet it demonstrates the importance of studying early films as part of the larger visual culture within a specific class environment, instead of simply stressing cinema's connection with modernity through its radical newness.

Multiplex programming in the UK: the economics of homogeneity

DEBORAH ALLISON

What determines the selection of films that end up on the screens of UK multiplexes? Time and again, cinema-goers question why so many venues all show the same thing, despite a low average seat occupancy, whilst other movies struggle to find a place on UK screens. The answer lies less in the range of films that are produced than in the business practices of the distribution and exhibition sectors. These practices have received far less public scrutiny than those of the production sector, yet they are critical in shaping the choice of films available for public consumption.

The UK exhibition industry has been in the news a lot over the last few years. We have heard reports of booming cinema attendance, with admissions for 2002 the best in thirty years. We have also experienced an explosion in the number of cinema screens in the country, which are at their highest levels since 1960. There are now at least 3450 screens at 770 UK sites, over double the number of screens existing in 1990. Over sixty-five per cent of these screens are in multiplex sites, a proportion that has grown steadily as multiplexes account for almost all new builds but only a small proportion of cinema closures.[1]

Such rapid expansion has not been without problems, however. The number of new screens has grown faster than cinema admissions. Between 1999 and 2000, for instance, screen numbers rose by 6.8% but admissions grew only 2.2% and, more alarmingly, between 2002 and 2003 screen numbers rose by 2.4% while admissions fell by 5.1%.[2] What this has meant is tougher competition between cinemas as audiences are spread more thinly. Some cities, such as Manchester and Cardiff, have far more screens than they can fill, although a few, such as Canterbury,

3   Anonymous, 'Global cinema
    exhibition', *Screen Digest*,
    September 2004, p. 272.

4   FPDSavills, *Commercial Leisure
    Bulletin*, summer 2004, p. 5.

remain severely underscreened, normally because local authorities have been reticent about granting planning permission for new builds. As we shall see, such an imbalance in screen numbers can have significant repercussions for cinema programming policy.

Per capita cinema admissions in the UK – around 2.8 visits per year in 2003 – are very low compared with other territories across Europe, as well as the USA, where 5.5 visits per year were averaged in the same period.[3] In the late 1990s, the venture capital companies responsible for most of the investment in new sites predicted that providing extra cinema screens, built to a high specification, would boost attendance towards US levels. After the market growth failed to meet their projections, many investors pared back plans for further expansion. There are now few new cinemas in development.

The financial pressures on cinema investors has been further exacerbated by the very high rents that were negotiated in the late 1990s.[4] The developers of the new shopping and leisure complexes that house many of the latest generation of multiplexes often attracted cinemas by offering rent-free periods for a fixed duration or until an agreed percentage of units in the development had been filled. Since site rental often vies with film rental as a cinema's biggest expense, the expiration of such offers over the past couple of years has contributed to the considerable financial losses clocked up by many operators.

Pressures of high rents and intense competition for customers has led to many venture capitalists wishing to pull out of the UK industry and practically all of the best-known names have changed hands within the last few years. The largest chain, Odeon, has been sold three times since 2000. Its most recent sale participates in the considerable consolidation that has taken place since 2003 as, along with UCI, it is now owned by Terra Firma Investments. The Cineworld and UGC chains have been sold to Blackstones, who will trade under the Cineworld brand. Vue Cinemas (previously known as SBC) has absorbed both Ster Century and Warner Village. After the Office of Fair Trading challenged Terra Firma's domination of certain local markets, nominated sites were divested from the chain and have recently been purchased by the Irish cinema operator Ward Anderson. It is clear that the market is increasingly dominated by a small handful of companies who remain in intense competition with one another.

Just as the make-up of the exhibition sector helps to determine the range of films accessible to UK cinema-goers, so does that of the distribution sector. This is also dominated by a small number of companies, the leaders of which are the US majors UIP, Buena Vista, Sony (the new owners of Columbia Tristar), Warner Bros and Twentieth Century Fox. Within the last few years, Entertainment Film Distributors has also taken a place in the major league, largely thanks to a deal secured with New Line that allowed the acquisition of a slate of strong titles, most notably the *Lord of the Rings* franchise (2001–2003). The first of these, *Lord of the Rings: Fellowship of the Ring* (2001; released

5   For the sake of clarity, two dates will appear in the brackets after the film titles in this article: the year of first release, followed by the precise UK release date in keeping with the topic of the paper.

6   Robert Mitchell, 'Entertainment is UK distribution champion', *Screen Daily*, 13 June 2002. Http://www.screendaily.com/story.asp?storyid=8590&st=entertainment+champion&s=3 (accessed 18 April 2003).

7   Robert Mitchell, 'UK set for close-run race for 2002 distributor crown', *Screen Daily*, 3 December 2003. Http://www.screendaily.com/story.asp?storyid=10431&st=distributor+share+uk+2002&s=3 (accessed 22 April 2003); Robert Mitchell, 'Schmidt points to flying start for Entertainment', *Screen Daily*, 28 January 2003. Http://www.screendaily.com/story.asp?storyid=10983&st=distributor+top+uk+2002&s=3 (accessed 22 April 2003).

8   UK Film Council, *Statistical Yearbook 2003* (London: UK Film Council, 2004), p. 18.

9   Monopolies and Mergers Commission, *Films: A Report on the Supply of Films for Exhibition in Cinemas in the UK* (London: HMSO, 1994).

10 Film Distributors' Association, *Standard Conditions for Licensing the Commercial Exhibition of a Film or Films*, effective from 1 February 2002. Details of the revisions and the rationale behind them can be found at Office of Fair Trading. Http://www.oft.gov.uk/nr/rdonlyres/31316879-3674-4760-9d51-8f6ca529ad23/0/film.pdf (accessed 30 November 2004).

11 Office of Fair Trading, 'OFT reviews film distributors orders and postal franking machine undertakings'. Http://www.oft.gov.uk/news/press+releases/2003/pn+101-03.htm (accessed 30 November 2004).

12 Monopolies and Mergers Commission, *Films: A Report on the Supply of Films*, p. 7.

13 The Films (Exhibition Periods) Order 1996.

19 December 2001),[5] played an enormous role in elevating Entertainment to the highest grossing UK distributor in the first five months of 2002.[6] After intense speculation that the company might become the first independent distributor to top this chart, Entertainment was pipped to the post by Twentieth Century Fox.[7] In addition to these large distribution companies, there are five or six others that put out at least a handful of mainstream titles each year, along with companies specializing in art house and niche markets. These rarely make any significant impact on the box office, however, with some releasing only one film in a year. In 2003, 479 films were released by 64 distribution companies, but the top six companies accounted for a massive 91.4% share of the total box office.[8]

The domination of the distribution sector by a small number of companies has, for some time, amounted to a complex monopoly. The Office of Fair Trading (OFT) has investigated the restrictive practices that this arrangement engenders on a number of occasions, deeming major cinema circuits complicit to some degree, but reserving the weight of its censure for film distribution.[9] The OFT's most recent intervention came in January 2002, when it decreed that certain clauses must be removed from the standard terms and conditions of trade issued to exhibitors by the Film Distributors Association as a collective agreement on the part of their members.[10] Whilst it is no longer permitted for some conditions to be agreed through a process of collective bargaining, several of the largest distribution companies reinstated the disputed clauses in their own revised individual standard terms. The combination of the majors' market share and the fact that cinema admissions are largely product-driven has ensured that, despite increased consolidation within the exhibition sector, the balance of negotiating power continues to rest with them. Consequently, very little practical change resulted from the OFT's intervention, who announced in July 2003 that UK film distribution would be subject to further scrutiny.[11]

The most thorough investigation of industry practices in recent years was the Monopolies and Mergers Commission's (MMC) report into the supply of films to UK cinemas. This was prompted by complaints from independent cinemas about difficulties in obtaining popular product as, in an increasingly crowded marketplace, cinemas compete not only for customers but also for prints of new releases.[12] The report was published in 1994, leading to new legislation through the Films Order of 1996.[13] Nevertheless, the restrictive practices the report uncovered are still in widespread operation and continue to exercise a significant impact on the programming of UK cinemas. To better understand the implications of these practices, it is worth taking a general look at the basic processes involved in releasing films and programming them into mainstream cinemas.

The calendar of UK releases has been extremely packed over the past few years and shows every sign of remaining so in the year to come. Most multiplex programmers base their film plans around a calendar issued

weekly by ACNielsen EDI, a company that collates data and sells it back to the industry in a range of useful formats. Each calendar lists the titles due for release over the next six months, their distributors and their release patterns. These include, firstly, saturation releases, which open in virtually every mainstream cinema in the UK. Secondly, there are wide releases of roughly 50–200 prints, which play in most of the larger multiplexes, and perhaps some other sites depending on the nature of the film. Thirdly, there are limited releases, which normally open on less than 50 copies, occasionally with as little as one print, such as *Callas Forever* (2002; 19 November 2004). Other release strategies include a regional release – Scotland only, for instance – which is normally applied to children's films where school holiday dates vary geographically, but which may also be used for local interest films that are not expected to garner considerable interest elsewhere in the UK. Some films 'platform' in the West End, before the release expands across the country. Films that have no obvious hook, but which are expected to generate excellent reviews and word of mouth often open on a relatively small number of prints before going into more cinemas later in the run. A gradual expansion of screen numbers worked to excellent effect when used for *Gosford Park* (2001; 1 February 2002), which achieved its maximum coverage of 230 screens during its seventh week of release. Platforming may also prove extremely effective for escalating the hype surrounding a film that is already much anticipated. The ploy was used very successfully for the UK release of *The Incredibles* (2004; 19 November 2004), which opened on just one screen at the UCI Empire Leicester Square, where it grossed a substantial £81,307 in its first three days.[14]

This sounds like an extremely organized system through which cinemas can select the product they wish to play. One of the main hurdles for programme planners is that release dates are constantly on the move. Distributors regularly try to stake out favourable dates for their major pictures a long time – often more than a year – in advance.[15] Bank holiday weekends, in particular, tend to be very attractive to distributors. There was a point at which 22 March 2002, the start of the Easter holidays for most schools, was scheduled for five saturation releases, followed by another six saturation releases, a wide release and a couple of limited releases on the Easter weekend of 29 March.[16]

In such a situation, it is impossible for all of the distributors to get their films played in as many cinemas as they would wish. In an eight-screen multiplex, for instance, it is rarely possible to handle more than three new releases in a week – just a fraction of the titles originally pencilled in for the 2002 Easter holidays. The inevitable result of such an overcrowding of the calendar is a battle of nerves where most of the distribution companies hold tight for as long as possible, until those handling weaker titles move their films to other dates. Sometimes more titles are moved than is necessary, so one or more may move back again, or else another film may shift into the space. The calendar is consequently in a state of

14 Unless otherwise stated, all box office figures are from ACNeilsen EDI.

15 A general account of the considerations involved in selecting a release date can be found in Film Distributors' Association, *Guide to UK Film Distribution* (London: FDA, 2002), pp. 6–7. A summary of the main annual film release trends is provided in Steve Rose, 'The twelve seasons of film', *The Guardian* (*Review* supplement), 29 November 2002, pp. 14–15.

16 The EDI calendars for the weeks commencing 14 January 2002 and 21 January 2002 listed the following saturation releases for 22 March 2002: *Ice Age* (2002), *Thunderpants* (2002), *The Adventures of Jimmy Neutron*, a.k.a. *Jimmy Neutron: Boy Genius* (2001), *Return to Neverland* (2002) and *Ali G Indahouse* (2002). *The Time Machine* (2002), *ET (20th Anniversary Edition)* (1982/2002), *Panic Room* (2002), *The One* (2001), *Crossroads* (2001) and *Blade 2* (2002) were scheduled for saturation releases on 29 March 2002 along with a wide release of *Hart's War* (2002). Of these titles, *Thunderpants*, *The Time Machine*, *Panic Room*, *The One* and *Hart's War* were subsequently moved to different dates.

research note

17 Anonymous, 'Hollywood actors' strike averted at last minute', *The Guardian*, 4 July 2001. Http://film.guardian .co.uk/ News_Story/Exclusive/ 0,,516648,00.html (accessed 30 November 2004).

18 UK Film Council, *Film in the UK 2002: Statistical Yearbook* (London: UK Film Council, 2003), p. 17.

perpetual flux. Over the last couple of years there has been more product slated for release than cinemas can handle, so many titles have been repeatedly shunted to later dates. In 2002–2003, much of this surplus was attributable to the anticipated actors' and writers' strikes of 2001. This threat caused a rush to complete the principal photography of some major releases, as well as the stockpiling of a large number of low-budget teen comedy and horror films, in order to provide for a subsequent shortage of product.[17] After lengthy strikes failed to materialize, producers were naturally keen to recoup their investments. The trend has persisted however and, especially in the UK, film production has continued to outstrip the capacity for theatrical release, so that an increasing proportion of films made in this country fail to make it onto cinema screens at all.

A surplus of product may seem to contradict the assertion that there are too many cinemas in some areas, competing with one another for product. Such a strange situation is perpetuated by the practices of both cinemas and distributors, which encourage most sites to play the same titles as each other, at the expense of other movies. In 2002, a mere twenty films accounted for 22.8% of all box office takings in the UK.[18]

All multiplex operators prioritize projected blockbuster films such as *Spider-Man 2* (2004; 16 July 2004). These films often play on multiple prints, with the larger multiplexes sometimes running six or more copies of a single title. Once these tent pole releases are in place, programmers slot the weaker movies, which are more likely to change date, into the gaps. There are certainly clear benefits to booking these second-tier films as early as possible, both in order to secure copies and to allow the cinema to market the film effectively. However, the situation that no operator wishes to experience is that of confirming mediocre titles and then finding that a stronger film has moved to that date, thus causing a problem with the availability of screen space.

Anticipated box office is the main criterion used by cinemas in selecting the product they will play. It is not the only relevant factor though. The way in which a cinema calculates the rental terms paid to distribution companies can also influence programming policy. The payment method used may determine whether it is more profitable for a cinema to show a new release that will attract a reasonably strong audience, or an older film that draws slightly lower admissions.

The negotiation of film terms is critical to both cinemas and distributors. For cinemas, attracting as many customers as possible is a sound basic principle, but they also need to consider the proportion of the ticket money that they will get to keep. Film terms are normally calculated in one of three ways. Some cinemas negotiate straight percentages on a film-by-film basis. When a film is first released, the proportion of the box office takings paid to the distributors is relatively high, usually reducing further into the run. Blockbuster movies command higher rental terms than weaker titles. This not only reflects the costs to the distributor of acquiring and marketing the film, but also the

attractiveness of the film to cinemas. An exhibitor would be taking an enormous risk if they refused to play a blockbuster because they felt the film rental was too high, whilst low terms may be one of the only ways of getting weaker films on screen. Straight percentages are normally negotiated on the basis of box office predictions, but other methods of payment are linked more directly to revenue. Some cinemas use a system of sliding scales, where the percentages paid to distributors increase in line with box office grosses at each individual site. The third method is known as the nut system. This places a hypothetical value on each seat in the auditorium which, multiplied by the number of seats, gives a 'house nut'. If a film grosses less than this 'nut break' figure in a week, the cinema will pay only 25% of the gross takings. If, however, this figure is exceeded, they will pay 90% of the excess, or 25% of the takings, whichever is the greater. For a successful film, this system may result in the cinema paying a percentage of the takings that is well in excess of 70%. This system is designed to allow cinemas to cover their running costs and turn a modest profit. It works in favour of the cinema when a film performs badly and the distributor when a film performs well.

Where a cinema uses straight percentages, their share of the takings will almost always increase the longer a film has been out. This means that they may find it more profitable to show an older film to a smaller audience than they will a newer film. Under the nut system, were the film to remain on the same screen throughout the run, the percentage paid would normally fall as the audience for that title ebbed away and takings ceased to exceed the nut break figure. In reality, older films are normally pushed down into smaller screens as audiences shrink. This reduces the nut break figure, meaning that the terms paid can rise as well as fall. The break figure is also reduced if the number of weekly performances is cut. For cinemas using this system there may therefore be less benefit to playing older movies and a greater incentive to open more new releases than there is for those operating on a system of straight percentages.

There are other criteria for cinemas to consider when deciding which films to play. As well as estimating how well a film is going to open in a particular site, it is necessary to evaluate how well it is likely to hold. Will it be front-loaded, like *Van Helsing* (2004; 7 May 2004), meaning that it will open well before plummeting in week two after disappointing word of mouth, or will it hold well, like *My Big Fat Greek Wedding* (2001; 20 September 2002), which attracted a larger audience on its second weekend than it did on the first?[19] Making these kinds of judgements is crucial for deciding how many new films to open. Understanding the core audience demographic of individual sites is also critical for programmers, as films do not perform evenly across the UK. Central London, for instance, does not represent a large market for children's films. On the other hand, suburban multiplexes with easy road access and free parking prove much more attractive to family audiences. This difference is highlighted by the typical example of *The Cat in the*

19 *Van Helsing* grossed £4,944,422 across the UK on its opening weekend, dropping by 51% to £2,407,082 on the second weekend. *My Big Fat Greek Wedding* grossed £1,503,436 on its opening weekend, and showed a 7% increase on its second weekend when it grossed £1,605,271, despite a rise of only 1% in the number of screens on which it played.

Hat (2003; 2 April 2004), which attained 7.8% of the UK gross on its opening week, but only 3.2% of the West End gross.

I have outlined some of the choices that cinemas make in selecting product to play, but other factors frequently inhibit their ability to follow closely the anticipated audience demand. These often result from the activities and demands of major distribution companies. In 1994 the Monopolies and Mergers Commission identified seven practices deemed to be products of a complex monopoly.[20] These are as follows:

20 Monopolies and Mergers Commission, *Films: A Report on the Supply of Films*, p. 261.

1. *Alignment* – this occurs when distributors prioritize a particular cinema chain when allocating film prints, or when a cinema chain prioritizes the product of a particular distributor.
2. *Exclusivity* – this is where a contractual agreement is made, which specifies that for a set period of time only one cinema in a given area will be provided with a copy of a particular film.
3. *Refusal to supply* – this practice is criticized if distributors withhold product from certain cinemas without sufficient reason (such as non-payment of debts).
4. *Minimum exhibition periods* – distributors usually demand that, as a condition of receiving a print, cinemas must play a film for a certain number of weeks, irrespective of its performance at the box office. In 1996, new legislation specified a legal limit of two weeks as the minimum exhibition period for a new release.
5. *Restrictions on screen use* – distributors often demand that no other films share a screen with their own film, which must play all shows each day, even if the film does most of its business at a set time.
6. *Distributor influence on admission prices* – since distributors are paid on the basis of a percentage of box office takings, they have sometimes exerted pressure to inflate admission prices. In particular, they are often keen to prevent cinemas from using price promotions in order to develop their audience.
7. *SFD conditions* – this refers to an adherence to the *Standard Terms and Conditions of Trade* issued by the Society of Film Distributors' (now Film Distributors Association, or FDA). These conditions were revised in 2002 at the behest of the Office of Fair Trading.

The MMC findings clearly reveal that the ability of cinemas to select the product they feel best suited to their customers may be hampered by an inability to secure prints as well as by contractual obligations to commit screen space to other titles. Although distributors argue, with often considerable justification, that such demands are necessary to protect their own business interests and to recoup their investment in film prints, the MMC investigation suggests that such activities are sometimes taken too far. Indeed, the range of restrictive practices detailed in their report will strike a chord with historians of US cinema since it reveals striking similarities between the contemporary British film industry and the practices operating under the US studio system.[21]

21 Monopolies and Mergers Commission, *Films: A Report on the Supply of Films*, pp. 308–9. For a more detailed discussion of the restrictive practices operating under the American studio system see Ernest Borneman, 'United States versus Hollywood: the case study of an antitrust suit', in Tino Balio (ed.), *The American Film Industry* (London: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985), pp. 449–62.

22 *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets* was released on 1275 screens at 524 sites, achieving the UK's biggest three-day opening of all time. Robert Mitchell, 'Potter's record opening has little impact on UK holdovers', *Screen Daily*, 20 November 2002. Http:// www.screendaily.com/story.asp? storyid=10319&st= harry+potter+print &s=3 (accessed 18 April 2003). *Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers* was released on 1160 screens in the UK. Robert Mitchell, 'Towering success: *Lord of the Rings* sequel goes international', *Screen Daily*, 24 December 2002. Http:// www.screendaily.com/story.asp? storyid=10674&st= rings+sequel+uk&s=3 (accessed 18 April 2003).

23 Robert Mitchell, 'Bond and Potter generate $22.5 m weekend between them from 66% of the nation's screens', *Screen Daily*, 26 November 2002. Http:// www.screendaily.com/story.asp? storyid=10391&st= bond+potter+uk&s=3 (accessed 18 April 2003). This percentage takes into account the practice of interlocking, where a single print is shown simultaneously on two or more screens. This is achieved by running a film on rollers across the projection booth and through a second projector.

24 Film Distributors' Association, *Guide to UK Film Distribution*, p. 10.

25 Figures from the Office of National Statistics show that film terms have rocketed since the mid-late 1980s. Office of National Statistics, 'GB Cinemas Enquiry 1950–2001'. Http:// www.statistics.gov.uk/statbase/ tsdataset.asp?vlnk=760& More=N&All=Y (accessed 30 November 2004).

Cinema policies can cause problems for distributors too, however. In spite of the excess of screens in many parts of the UK, it can often be very difficult for distributors to place prints of titles with limited box office potential. This is because almost all of the multiplex cinemas want to play the same thing. The franchise instalments, *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets* (2002; 15 November 2002) and *Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers* (2002; 18 December 2002) each went out on over 1000 prints.[22] The last Bond movie, *Die Another Day* (2002; 20 November 2002), also opened extremely widely on 827 copies. To the frustration of exhibitors nationwide, it opened five days after *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*, so that 66% of cinema screens in the UK were taken up by one of these two films.[23] Naturally this drastically reduced the choices available for viewers who wished to watch something else.

One of the main reasons that multiplex cinemas are keen to play blockbusters such as these on a large number of screens is that they have found that there is less customer loyalty in the mainstream sector than there is for art houses. The growth of multiplexes has also raised the expectations of customers, so that not only do they expect to be offered a wide range of titles to choose from, but they also expect a wide range of performance times for popular films. Many of the largest multiplexes aim to offer shows of films such as the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy every half hour or so as, in areas of intense competition, if one cinema is not running the film at exactly the time the customer wants to see it, they will go to a competitor that is.

It has been proven time and again that multiple prints do bolster cinema admissions, but they also reduce the choice of titles on offer to the public. Another effect of using multiple prints is that the distributor's expenditure increases, as film prints cost in the region of £1000 each.[24] This cost is then passed on to the exhibitor.[25] The use of multiple prints means that more of the customers are accommodated within the first couple of weeks of release, when the film rental terms are at their highest. Moreover, distributors may charge higher rental on second and successive prints of a film than they do on the first. Ultimately, the only two places from which these additional costs can be recouped are from advertising revenue and from the customers themselves, through higher ticket or concessions prices. The practice also disadvantages small art cinemas, who often rely on the profits from a handful of quality blockbusters to subsidise their general policy of showing foreign language and niche product. The saturation of multiplex screens with copies of popular films makes it especially difficult for the small sites to attract the audiences they need to survive.

The use of multiple prints is a currently popular business strategy as blockbusters have become increasingly front-loaded, attracting most of their customers early in the run. Through the strong summer periods, at least one big movie is released virtually every week, and these new openers normally dominate the charts. On its opening weekend, *Shrek 2* (2004; 9 July 2004) grossed £10,616,316, almost nine times as much as

its closest rival, *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban* (2004; 4 June 2004), which achieved a relatively paltry £1,211,445 over the same three day period. Although some titles such as *Die Geschichte vom weinenden Kamel/The Story of the Weeping Camel* (2003; 9 July 2004) or *Fahrenheit 9/11* (2004; 9 July 2004) may still be a slow burn, the theatrical shelf-life of movies is getting shorter and shorter. In times of a lot of strong product, each big film opens on multiple prints, supported by a huge P&A (prints and advertising) budget, typically around £1.8 million for a blockbuster. This strategy is geared towards pulling in as many customers as possible on the first weekend because, a week or two later, most of the potential customers will elect to watch the newest blockbuster, whether they have seen the previous one or not.

As the growth in the number of releases has made the UK market increasingly competitive, P&A costs have seen an enormous increase.[26] Whilst not all expensive advertising campaigns are as successful as might be wished, unless the distributor has prepared a good marketing plan, they are liable to experience difficulty in placing their product in some cinemas. Small releases – often very enjoyable films with the potential to cross over from art house to mainstream success – rarely get played in most multiplex cinemas, unless product is in short supply, since the lack of advertising increases their commercial risk.

One further point that cinemas need to take into consideration is that the choice of films played may have a significant impact on their concessions sales. The sale of food in cinemas normally accounts for a very substantial proportion of the revenue, with the average per capita spend per visit in the region of £1.20.[27] This provides further encouragement for the multiplexes to play films that target young, mainstream cinemagoers. Art house viewers are not traditionally big consumers of high-profit items such as popcorn and post-mix drinks. As popcorn is reputed to have the highest profit margin of any product in the world, it is unsurprising that cinemas are keen to encourage the highest possible levels of consumption.[28] Blockbusters such as the *Spider-Man* films (2002–2004) attract precisely the audiences that buy a lot of it.

In conclusion, there are many forces that come together to shape the pattern of what ends up on UK screens. Some of these arise from the practices of film distribution as a complex monopoly that holds the balance of power over exhibitors whilst also marginalizing independent distributors. At the same time, intense competition between cinemas means that most multiplexes prioritize the same titles, whilst ignoring others. Whereas this has been found to maximize admissions, the policy has also had the detrimental effect to cinemas of raising their film hire costs. For film viewers, the most notable effect of these economic pressures has been the failure of the escalating number of cinema screens to significantly expand their viewing choices.

Since its formation in 2000, the UK Film Council has sought to breach the barriers faced by exhibitors and distributors who wish to make available a wider range of quality filmmaking. In 2002 it acquired a

26 Leon Forde, 'UK P&A spend climbs to record levels', *Screen Daily*, 17 March 2003. Http:// www.screendaily.com/story.asp? storyid=11634&st= distributor+share+uk&s=3 (accessed 18 April 2003).

27 UK Film Council, *2001 Key UK Industry Facts*.

28 Giles Whittell, 'Cinema's real star', *The Times* (supplement), 1 May 2002, p. 2.

29 UK Film Council, *Annual Review 2003–4* (London: UK Film Council, 2004), pp. 56–7.

30 UK Film Council, '£12 million cinema-going revolution begins in UK as cinemas turn digital', 26 May 2005. Http://www.ukfilmcouncil.org.uk/news/?p=D4A157780cd7d24E47LmQ4394634 (accessed 27 May 2005).

£17 million budget to promote niche product in the UK. Part of this was made available to distributors for the marketing of specialized films.[29] Enhancing awareness of alternatives to the mainstream helps to increase its attractiveness to cinemas and the public alike. The bulk of the budget has been allocated to cinemas themselves, in order to create a 'virtual circuit' of digital art house screens in both multiplexes and small independent sites around the country. In May 2005, the Film Council named the 209 sites that would benefit from the installation of 238 digital screens, which would be devoted to 'more specialised (i.e. non-Hollywood), classic, and foreign language movies.'[30] This process is currently well underway and is due for completion in 2006.

The adoption of digital projection reduces the cost to distributors of striking and shipping film prints. This makes viable the provision of specialized product to a larger number of cinemas. This will be a boon to the art houses that already rely on such films but who often find it difficult to obtain them on or close to the release date when public awareness and demand is generally at its highest. At the same time, the obligation of participating multiplexes to play specialized product will increase its geographical provision outside the metropolitan areas in which most existing art houses are located.

Publicly funded government intervention, administered by the Film Council on behalf of the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, may indeed prove to be the only way of sustaining the availability of niche product to audiences across the UK. There is great optimism that the emergence of high-specification digital projection will make a tangible difference in the near future. In the meantime, though, the dominance of film exhibition by multiplex chains shows every sign of engendering an increasingly homogenized experience of cinema going for most audiences.

Ofcom's first year and neoliberalism's blind spot: attacking the culture of production

SYLVIA HARVEY

> I know what the story is. I've read the story. But what is it trying to say? What is it about? Why are we doing this story vs. this story, vs. even another story? Why? What are these characters really saying to an audience? What are we trying to have them think or feel about a story . . . ? It's the most terrifying question in this town.[1]

Thus spoke an anonymous American television executive, describing the industry in Los Angeles or New York in the mid 1980s. And his 'terrifying question' – to do with both the content and the purposes of storytelling and of television – has a resonance in Britain today as the marketization of the medium grows apace, as competition intensifies in a multi-channel universe, as ratings drop, profits dip, audiences fragment and costs are cut.

Keen to further this process of competition in the UK, to encourage producers to become more export-aware and to facilitate the early migration of television services from analogue to digital, the British Government has recently completed an ambitious set of legislative arrangements, embodied in the 2003 *Communications Act*. The first and only child of this Act is the new regulatory agency: the Office of Communications, or 'Ofcom', born on 29 December 2003.

This essay suggests that Ofcom, like those who routinely avoid the 'terrifying question' noted in the citation above, appears to lack the skills and the will to address some of the key issues of content and of purpose in British broadcasting today. Thus, while this new body is distinguished in

its ability to assemble and publish a wide range of statistics about the industry, it may plausibly be accused of knowing 'the cost of everything and the value of nothing'. Its key operating paradigms appear to rule out an engagement with the splendid and slippery issues of quality and of value and to be incapable of dealing with questions of cultural significance. The standard cultural studies proposition – that cultural context in large part determines the production and circulation of meanings – is banished from its lunar landscape.

This distinctive myopia makes it ill-equipped at present to identify and foster the culture of production and the types of investment that are required to meet some of the key objectives outlined in the Communications Act. Specifically, the Act allocates to Ofcom a duty to oversee the provision of television services which maintain 'high general standards' in respect of 'the contents of the programmes', 'the quality of the programme making' and the 'professional skill and editorial integrity applied in the making of the programmes'.[2]

It will be the contention of this article that, while Ofcom has sought to establish itself as the cutting edge public agency for communications in the twenty-first century, it is the BBC that has made a more profound and original contribution to the analysis of the conditions required for a flourishing audiovisual industry within the UK. There are therefore, three 'O's in this tale: Ofcom itself, and Oliver and Ohlbaum, the authors of a report entitled *UK Television Content in the Digital Age*, commissioned by the BBC and published in October 2003 in the relatively short 'window' between the passing of the Communications Act in July and the establishment of Ofcom in December.[3] The Oliver and Ohlbaum report has received relatively little public attention, but its findings make it a key document for any mature understanding of the shifting cross-currents that make up the world of contemporary television, and that define the choices available to audiences. This is so, despite the obvious fact that it is a document rooted in the strategy and tactics of institutional self-preservation. Its findings include a detailed account of how and where money is invested in making programmes in Britain and where, by contrast, there is an extensive 'recycling' of old programmes or importation of cheaper ones. The report is informed, this essay will suggest, by a 'makers' mentality', that is one that focuses on those conditions that make cultural production and the 'making of meaning' possible. It is this stance or orientation that is (so far) rarely to be found within documentation produced by Ofcom.

The new regulatory body has taken over the duties of five predecessor organizations and deals with telecommunications, spectrum allocation, broadcasting standards and the regulation of commercial radio and television.[4] Ofcom also has limited powers in relationship to the BBC. It is a powerful body, employing around 730 staff, housed in striking new accommodation overlooking the River Thames and covering a wide waterfront of regulatory topics from mobile phones and broadband to

5 Details of staff numbers in March 2004 are given in Ofcom's *Annual Report 2003–04* (London: Ofcom, 2004), p. 98.

6 BBC, *Building Public Value, Reviewing the BBC for a Digital World* (London: BBC, 2004).

7 Karol Jakubovicz, 'A square peg in a round hole: the EU's policy on public service broadcasting', in Ib Bondebjerg and Peter Golding (eds), *European Culture and the Media* (Bristol: Intellect Books, 2004), pp. 277–301, especially p. 295.

8 Communications Act, 2003.

cable and satellite television.[5] This essay deals only with Ofcom's broadcasting responsibilities.

Unlike its predecessors on the television side of the family (the Independent Television Commission, the Independent Broadcasting Authority and the original Independent Television Authority), Ofcom has appointed few senior staff with experience of making or regulating television programmes. Its leading figures – drawn largely from the worlds of advertising, cable, consultancy and politics – appear to have little interest in the qualitative dimensions of an audiovisual culture. Its ethos is predominantly neoliberal, and its language and organizing concepts are suitable for an analysis of markets and of competition, but not of social significance and cultural value. In this regard the conceptual world evoked by the BBC's policy document *Building Public Value* seems foreign to it.[6] Rather, Ofcom may be seen to share the preoccupations or prejudices of the European Commission in routinely denying to television the status of culture. As one distinguished Polish commentator has noted, the Commission habitually refuses to 'take a culturalist view', whereas the European Parliament has on a number of occasions sought to emphasize the cultural role and significance of broadcasting.[7]

In addition, Ofcom's emphasis on technological convergence (the digitization of communications that facilitates the merging of music and the audiovisual, of telephone services, computing and the internet) has led to a focus on what are seen as the two major issues of 'carriage' and 'content'. A policy for 'carriage' is concerned with ensuring competition in the provision of communicative infrastructure (more than one telephone or broadband provider, for example), while 'content' refers mainly – in this context – to radio and television services, since Ofcom has no powers in respect of the content of private telephone traffic or of the internet.

Given this institutional dualism of 'carriage' and 'content', there appears to be little sense that content has a *qualitative* and not merely quantitative dimension. Hence the range and excellence of statistical data to be found in Ofcom's many publications is not matched by reflection upon the social significance and cultural value of radio and television programmes. The emphasis on measuring at the expense of evaluating suggests a kind of institutional autism characterized by a sharp focus on facts and an inability to see the bigger picture or to sense the shifting tones and textures of a social and cultural environment.

In its defence, Ofcom will argue that it was given no brief by government to take a close interest in the form and content of programmes. Yet, as we have seen, there are provisions in the Communications Act which require some engagement with issues of quality and with the activity of production. Clause 264 of the Act refers to 'the quality of the programme making' and to the 'professional skill and integrity' applied in making the programmes.[8] The same clause requires public service broadcasting to ensure that 'cultural activity in the

9 Ibid., Clause 264, (6), (b).

United Kingdom, and its diversity, are reflected, supported and stimulated' within the programmes.[9] These are quite ambitious requirements and they are rooted in a long tradition of British law and regulation that has assumed since the 1950s that the regulatory body would take a non-partisan interest in cultural matters. In this regard Ofcom can be seen as the product of an uneasy mix of earlier traditions along with newer commitments to neoliberal and deregulatory principles and values.

It will be appropriate now to trace the take-up of these neoliberal principles as they developed during the 1980s and 1990s under the leadership of Margaret Thatcher in Britain, and under both Republican and Democrat Presidents in the USA.

In broadcasting, Thatcher's major innovations can be seen in the Broadcasting Act of 1990. There was widespread subsequent rejection of her policy of allocating commercial television licences to the highest bidder, but this law can be seen to exert a continuing influence on public policy in at least three ways. Firstly it acknowledged that the BBC was something of a special case by leaving it largely outwith the provisions of the law, allowing the Corporation to be retained as the 'cornerstone' of British broadcasting (a policy attributable largely to non- or anti-Thatcherite forces within the Conservative government). Secondly, the 1990 law evinced a determination to facilitate increased competition in the field of broadcasting, and gave considerable support to the interests of News International in its then risky and now highly successful move into satellite television. Thirdly it sought to ensure that the regulation of commercial broadcasting would in future be characterized by a 'light touch', although it retained a long-standing historical commitment to regulate for services of high quality, for the provision of news and current affairs and for the retention of the principle of impartiality in factual programmes dealing with major current controversies.

However, perhaps as important as the specific provisions of this 1990 law was the changed climate of political principles and values that it reflected and embodied. Increasingly, within neoliberal circles, broadcasting in Britain came to be seen as a tradable service or commodity, best submitted to the market disciplines applying to all other privately traded services or commodities. The arguments and evidence for this new paradigm were effectively marshalled in the Peacock Report of 1986.[10] While British conservative opinion was effectively split over the issue of the BBC's status as a 'special case', the description and analysis of broadcasting in the UK came increasingly to reflect the tenor of long-established debates about commercial broadcasting in the USA.

With an eye on their American cousins, though some seven years behind them, the British Parliament, under a New Labour government, enacted its new legislation on broadcasting and telecommunications in July 2003. In the USA the *Telecommunications Act* of 1996 had addressed some of the same issues, moved by the prospect of an increasing overlap between telecommunications, computing and

10 The Peacock Committee, *Report of the Committee on Financing the BBC, 1986,* Cmnd 9824 (London: HMSO, 1986).

broadcasting and seeking to reposition the state as promoter of the big 'D': the world of digital communication that promised increased choice for audiences and threatened slow death for network broadcasters. In 1997 Reed Hundt, then Chair of a Democrat-appointed Federal Communications Commission (FCC), noted that Congress had stated its preference for a national policy framework that was 'pro-competitive and deregulatory', signalling a 'paradigm shift from regulated monopoly to deregulated competition'.[11]

In this respect the Clinton White House was carrying the torch lit during the Reagan Presidency with a philosophy that had been outlined in 1982 by Mark Fowler, chair of a Republican-controlled FCC: 'the perception of broadcasters as community trustees should be replaced by a view of broadcasters as marketplace participants'.[12] Some commentators have seen a similar philosophy becoming dominant within the EU, and Shalini Venturelli notes this tendency in her detailed study of the process whereby private property interests have replaced or obscured public interest in the field of communications:

> The technological-necessity argument for releasing private-communications proprietors from public obligation now forms the centrepiece of most proposals for the information society.[13]

By 1996, in a culture where public service values already had little purchase in US commercial broadcasting, the concept of 'public interest' was, as Pat Aufderheide remarks, 'widely reconstrued to mean an open market environment that could be maintained with a minimum of government interference'.[14] It is perhaps not surprising to find that these ideas and principles – gaining momentum in neoliberal circles over the previous twenty years – were to be influential with the New Labour government in Britain, preparing communications legislation at the dawn of a new millennium. Ofcom's difficulties in engaging with issues of culture and content can also be related to the legacy of Mark Fowler, reluctant regulator, whose views were vividly reported by the *Washington Post* in 1983. Television was, Fowler proposed, 'just another appliance . . . a toaster with pictures'.[15] As we shall see, there are elements in the recent UK legislation which mark and to some extent sustain a radically different view of the role of television. Nonetheless, the British law of 2003 pays its respects to this robust American neoliberalism.

If Ofcom's leadership and actions can be seen to carry forward the implementation of neoliberal principles in broadcasting, it is also – like the statute that created it – torn between civic and market principles. One of these civic principles, the one most fought over as the Communications Bill moved through both Houses of Parliament, concerned the recognition of *citizen* as well as of consumer interests in the field of communications. It was largely as a result of a cross-party alliance between the opposition Conservatives and Liberal Democrats, and as a result of sustained political battles in the House of Lords, that a

11 Patricia Aufderheide, *Communications Policy and the Public Interest. The Telecommunications Act of 1996* (New York, NY and London: the Guilford Press, 1999), pp. 284 and 291.

12 Mark Fowler and Daniel Brenner, cited in Aufderheide, *Communications Policy and the Public Interest*, p. 28.

13 Shalini Venturelli, *Liberalizing the European Media. Politics, Regulation and the Public Sphere* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), p. 153.

14 Aufderheide, *Communications Policy and the Public Interest*, p. 26.

15 Fowler, cited in C. Edwin Baker, *Media, Markets and Democracy* (Cambridge and New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 3.

16 Communications Act 2003, Clause 3, (1), (a).

17 Ofcom's final report on Phase 3 of its review of public service broadcasting appears not to use the term 'citizen-consumer': *Ofcom Review of Public Service Television Broadcasting. Phase 3 – Competition for Quality* (London: Ofcom, February 2005).

18 Some of these questions are explored in more depth in Carole Tongue and Sylvia Harvey, *Citizenship, Culture and Public Service Broadcasting*, a submission to Ofcom's Review of Public Service Television Broadcasting, June, 2004. Available at http://www.ofcom.org.uk/consult/condocs/psb/responses/q_z/ccpsb.pdf (accessed on 23 March 2005).

19 Communications Act 2003, Clause 264, (6), (c).

20 Ibid., Clause 279, (1), (b) and Clause 279, (3).

21 Ibid., Clause 320.

22 Ibid., Clause, 321, (2) and (7).

striking new responsibility was given to Ofcom and listed as one of the two 'principal duties' of the new body: 'to further the interests of citizens in relation to communications matters'.[16]

In subsequent documentation Ofcom adopted a phrase which attempted to condense the two duties into one term, that of the 'citizen-consumer'. This term – to be found nowhere in the Act – attracted much criticism on the grounds that, both linguistically and philosophically, it subordinated the first term to the primacy of the second, appearing to reinforce the dominance of the theory of the 'sovereign consumer' and of the relative and adjectival insignificance of the 'citizen'. It is unclear at the time of writing whether or not Ofcom will continue to use the term.[17]

What aspects of the Communications Act and of the powers granted to Ofcom might be seen to promote the interests of citizens in respect of broadcasting? And what elements of the new law see broadcasters as at least to some extent 'community trustees' as well as 'marketplace participants' (to adjust the terms proposed by Mark Fowler and cited earlier in this article)?[18] There are three sets of topics outlined in the Act that are relevant in this regard: firstly, the requirements for news and current affairs, secondly the support for the principles of impartiality and of editorial integrity and, thirdly, the issue of pluralism and of diversity in programme content. This last topic also includes some provisions that recognize the significance of national and regional differences within the UK.

The public service remit defined by the Act (and applied only to the five terrestrial channels) requires, among other things, services that are:

> appropriate for facilitating civic understanding and fair and well-informed debate on news and current affairs, a comprehensive and authoritative coverage of news and current affairs in, and in the different parts of, the United Kingdom and from around the world.[19]

Well-resourced news and current affairs programmes on radio and television may be seen to provide part of the bedrock for informed citizenship and therefore for democracy itself. The Act requires that News and Current Affairs programmes of 'high quality' must be shown at intervals throughout the day, including in peak time.[20] In addition, the 'special impartiality requirements' apply to programmes transmitted by all broadcasters licensed in the UK – not only to the 'old gang' of the five terrestrials. This clause of the Act makes it clear that, unlike newspaper proprietors, the owners of television stations may not use them to advance their own views and opinions – although this does not limit the representation of a wide spectrum of views and opinions expressed by others. It should also be noted that the impartiality provision relates not to all topics but only to 'matters of political or industrial controversy' and 'matters relating to current public policy'.[21] The idea that television should provide, as far as possible, non-partisan information is further reinforced by the prohibition on political advertising, although there is provision for political party campaigns.[22] Ofcom's Standards Code is

also enjoined to promote (in the context of advertising, sponsorship and any other pressures):

> the desirability of maintaining the independence of editorial control over programme content.[23]

With regard to pluralism and diversity there are a variety of elements in the law that try to give substance to these essentially cultural principles. Ofcom must recognize

> the different interests of persons in the different parts of the United Kingdom, of the different ethnic communities within the United Kingdom and of persons living in rural and in urban areas.[24]

As already indicated, a variety of programme genres – drama, comedy, music, feature films and visual and performing arts programmes – should ensure that 'cultural activity in the United Kingdom, and its diversity, are reflected, supported and stimulated'. There should also be a sufficient range of educational programmes and of programmes dealing with: 'science, religion and other beliefs, social issues, matters of international significance or interest and matters of specialist interest', and there is some recognition that children (perhaps remembered here as non-consumers) should be served by 'a suitable quantity and range of high quality and original programmes'.[25]

The Act also recognizes the differences between the various nations and regions that make up the country, and seeks to make provision for correspondingly distinctive cultural needs. Thus there are special arrangements for Welsh language broadcasting, provided by Sianel Pedwar Cymru (the Welsh Fourth Channel) and funded both by advertising and by special parliamentary grant, and there is provision for the public funding of a Gaelic Media Service in Scotland.[26] Moreover, the cultural and economic benefits of distributing investment in programme-making throughout the UK, and not concentrating it predominantly within London, are noted. Consequently, Channels 3 (ITV), 4 and 5 are all required to ensure that a suitable proportion of programmes designed for network transmission are made by centres or companies based 'outside the M25 area'.[27]

The needs of the English regions have been noted in British legislation since the 1950s, in particular as a consequence of the regional structure and production bases of the ITV companies.[28] Historically two categories of regional programmes have been supported within commercial television; firstly, regional *news* and, secondly, other programmes 'of particular interest to persons living within the area for which the service is provided'.[29] There is also, in the 2003 legislation, a requirement that the majority of such programmes, intended for regional and not for national network viewing, should be made within the region where they are transmitted.

However, as has been widely noted in the general and the trade press, ITV's commitment to non-news regional programming has diminished

23 Ibid., Clause 319, (4), (f).

24 Ibid., Clause 3, (4), (l).

25 Ibid., Clause 264, (6), (b), (e), (f) and (h).

26 Ibid., Clauses 199–207 and 208–210.

27 Ibid., Clauses 286 and 288.

28 For other contributions to the debate about regional broadcasting see Paddy Scannell and David Cardiff, *A Social History of British Broadcasting. Volume 1, 1922–1939. Serving the Nation* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1991) and Sylvia Harvey and Kevin Robins (eds), *The Regions, the Nations and the BBC* (London: British Film Institute, 1993).

29 Communications Act 2003, Clause 287, (1), (a). For further discussion of Channel 4 see Sylvia Harvey, 'Channel 4 and the redefining of public service broadcasting', in Michele Hilmes (ed.), *The Television History Book* (London: British Film Institute, 2003), pp. 50–4.

and there have been large numbers of job losses within the English regional centres. Ofcom has endorsed these changes in the belief that ITV can no longer afford the luxury of such an extended regional service, although regional news requirements remain.[30] In the light of government and ministerial support for the principle of foreign investment and ownership, it may be that Ofcom – in acting to reduce ITV's costs and in tolerating a reduced regional service – is acting to prepare the way for this foreign intervention.

Finally, in respect of pluralism and diversity, considered as a contributory element within 'civic' broadcasting, Channel 4 retains some of the key elements of its remit as defined in earlier legislation. This includes an obligation to demonstrate 'innovation, experiment and creativity in the form and content of programmes' and a requirement to appeal to 'the tastes and interests of a culturally diverse society'.[31] No longer the lightning conductor of political dissent, as in its first decade of existence, Channel 4 has now joined the competition club and fears loss of viewers and of advertising revenue. Nonetheless, the legislation (and continuing Ofcom support) sets Channel 4 apart from the privately owned sector of broadcasting and thus from shareholder and profitability pressures.

These are, in summary, some of the key public service provisions and consequences of the 2003 Act and, taken together, they constitute Ofcom's prospectus or mission. However, there is a touch of unreality about this prospectus, for Ofcom is enjoined to act not just as a light touch regulator but as a retrospective or 'after the fact' regulator. Companies are required to publish their programme proposals for the year ahead and then to monitor and comment upon their own work. This new principle of self-regulation makes Ofcom something of a distant observer, despite its continuing power to fine companies that contravene their licence conditions.

It is too soon to make an informed judgement about the extent to which this reluctant regulator will be able to 'maintain and strengthen' public service broadcasting or ensure the provision of a 'wide range of television and radio services . . . of high quality'.[32] However a number of distinguished industry executives have criticized aspects of the Labour government's emphasis upon competition, considered as a tool for ensuring excellence. At a Royal Television Society conference in 2002, as the Communications Bill stood poised on the brink of Parliamentary scrutiny, the then-Chair of the BBC Governors, Sir Christopher Bland, expressed concern about the possible consequences of a government competition policy designed to enable US ownership of British commercial television. Appointed to his post by a Conservative government, Bland noted that 'ownership and investment are not necessarily linked'. His Director General, Greg Dyke, elaborated on the point:

> In a mature industry like British commercial broadcasting US companies won't buy to invest . . . They will buy if they can increase

30 Ofcom Review of Public Service Television Broadcasting. Phase 3 – Competition For Quality (London: Ofcom, 2005), pp. 52–3 and 101.

31 Communications Act 2003, Clause 265, (3).

32 Ibid., Clause 264, (3) and Clause 3, (2)(c).

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33 Cited in Steve Clarke, 'Big guns join battle against US ownership', *Television, Journal of the Royal Television Society*, October 2002, pp. 20–21.

their own profitability by reducing investment in UK programming and selling more of their US programmes into this market.[33]

As we shall see in a later section of this article, the Oliver and Ohlbaum Report addresses the issue of investment in programme-making in some detail, but industry concerns in 2001–2 were not limited to the BBC. In a speech delivered in 2001, the then Director of ITV, David Liddiment, expressed his concerns about changes in the industry, criticizing a new emphasis on quantitative measures, and suggesting that competition in television was delivering uniformity not innovation:

> Numbers now seem to be the only universal measure for excellence we have: how many, how much, how often. We are losing sight of the innate value of programmes in our fixation on the success that can be measured by profit . . . . The relentless quest to find out what viewers want and then to give it to them has made for sameness.[34]

34 David Liddiment, McTaggart Speech at the Edinburgh International Television Festival, August 2001, cited in Michael Darlow, *Independents Struggle. The Programme Makers who Took on the TV Establishment* (London: Quartet Books, 2004), p. 582.

35 John Willis, 'The Sopranos won't save us', *Guardian*, 10 June 2002; cited in Darlow, *Independents Struggle*, p. 587.

A year later, John Willis – an executive with wide experience of both ITV and Channel 4 and driven into the temporary exile of working for the US public service broadcaster WGBH – wrote critically of US television output seen at close quarters. He lambasted the approach of the British government and its proposed new legislation in these terms: 'The government's vandalism is commercial as well as cultural, risking jobs and export revenue as well as range and quality of production'.[35] Despite the creative risks taken, exceptionally, by the US Home Box Office (HBO) and the high peaks of achievement represented by programmes like *The Sopranos* or *West Wing*, Willis found a system whose programmes were, in general, repetitive, 'old fashioned and conventional', and a society where 'disenfranchised citizens' saw commercial television as 'off their cultural radar, an irrelevance'. This kind of television, characterized more by choice of channels than by choice of content, is seen to have almost no civic significance and Willis's most devastating summary is cast in the words of his predecessor at WGBH, Peter McGhee: 'Most television enters our people and our body politic not as food for thought, but as an embalming fluid'.[36]

36 John Willis, 'The real cost of US ownership', *Television, Journal of the Royal Television Society*, November 2002, p. 9.

Prior to the passing of the 2003 Act these were the reservations expressed in Britain about the consequences of earlier Conservative legislation and the likely impact of the new deregulatory measures proposed by New Labour. We turn now to consider the eighteen-month period following the Act, the period during which Ofcom has been 'making its mark' as the body charged with fulfilling the Act's intentions, and the BBC has been quietly suggesting some alternative routes to the attainment of excellence on television.

How are the interests of citizens to be met in broadcasting, how is diversity to be delivered and pluralism sustained? How are programmes of 'high quality' to be made and transmitted? Ofcom's general answer,

37 *Ofcom Review of Public Service Television Broadcasting. Phase 3 – Competition for quality.*

38 See Steven Barnett and Emily Seymour, *"A Shrinking Iceberg Travelling South". Changing Trends in British Television: A Case Study of Drama and Current Affairs* (London: Campaign for Quality Television, 1999); and Jennie Stone, *Losing Perspective: Global Affairs on British Terrestrial Television 1989–1999* (Third World and Environment Broadcasting Project, 2000).

39 See, for example, Andrew Graham and Gavyn Davies, *Broadcasting, Society and Policy in the Multimeda Age* (Luton: University of Luton Press, 1997); and Nicholas Garnham, 'Public Service versus the Market', in *Capitalism and Communication* (London: Sage, 1990), pp. 115–35.

40 *Phase 3 – Competition for Quality*, p. 7.

41 These figures are drawn from various sections of the *Ofcom Review of Public Service Broadcasting, Phase 1 – Is Television Special?* (London: Ofcom, 2004). Revenue share figures are given on p. 27 and in Figure 38 on p. 63; audience share figures are given in Figure 14 of the Annex Documents, *What People Watch: The Television Audience*, made available on CD-ROM.

42 These issues are discussed from the perspective of those who have felt themselves pushed into a one-way street in Peter Golding and Phil Harris (eds), *Beyond Cultural Imperialism. Globalization, Communication and the New International Order* (London: Sage, 1997).

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offered throughout the three phases of its 2004 review of public service television, is 'through enhanced competition'. The title of its final report, *Competition for quality*, makes this clear.[37] Yet the multi-channel universe, growing exponentially since 1990 and offering audiences a greater choice of channels, has raised the cost of television services and increased the amount of re-cycled and imported material. A number of commentators have also suggested that the quality of television programmes has deteriorated since 1990.[38] In respect of rising costs there is a problem for the theory of competition since, in general, it is argued that economic competition is a mechanism for delivering the best to the most, at the cheapest prices. As various commentators have noted over the years, the theory cannot with ease be applied in the realm of audiovisual production.[39]

In its Phase 3 report Ofcom offers a fairly consensual and traditional definition of public service broadcasting.[40] However, two key elements are missing: the principle of universality of service on the one hand and the role of entertainment on the other. In both respects Ofcom may be seen to be preparing a defence for those commercial interests in broadcasting threatened by a BBC that is too popular. 'Entertainment' was, of course, the third element in the Reithian trinity of public service objectives: 'to inform, to educate and to entertain'.

The issue of increased costs for audiences in multi-channel (though not in Freeview) homes has been little acknowledged or reflected upon. As Ofcom's own figures demonstrate, the costs of viewing the five terrestrial channels are significantly lower than the costs of viewing the new channels. In 2002 the programmes to which audiences devoted, on average, 77% of their viewing time attracted 57% or just over half of total costs (for the five terrestrial channels), while the programmes which won a share of 23% of the audience attracted 43% of total costs (for the 'other', non-terrestrial channels);[41] and while multi-channel viewers may be aware of the monthly cost to them of subscription services on the one hand and of the BBC licence fee on the other, they may not be aware of the highly differentiated overall cost profile, or of the 'value for money' offered by terrestrial broadcasting; an economic and cultural value not fully acknowledged by Ofcom.

In this context cultural value (and 'content') may be linked to economic value in the sense that resources are a precondition for content creation in Britain as elsewhere in the world. Wherever content is produced and programmes made (more or less creatively), people are employed, economic activity is enhanced and there is a potential for the content of programmes to address local concerns. Where programmes are imported and exported there is, of course, potential for cultural exchange as long as this remains a two-way street and as long as each culture and country retains a production capacity.[42]

What the Oliver and Ohlbaum report notes is that the new, non-terrestrial channels, despite their considerable collective wealth, devote a very small proportion of their resources to making new

43 Ofcom, *What People Watch: The Television Audience*, Annex to *Is Television Special?* (CD-ROM), Figure 30. The ten programmes were: *Eastenders, Coronation Street, Emmerdale, Match of the Day Live, Holby City, Big Brother, The Full Monty* (film) and *Heartbeat*.

programmes and therefore to giving British-based producers an opportunity to bring new ideas and insights to local audiences. Ofcom implicitly recognizes the value of investment in indigenous content creation by pointing out that the top ten programmes viewed in multi-channel homes in the third quarter of 2003 were all drawn from the five terrestrial channels, and all had British subject matter.[43] Five of these programmes were transmitted by the BBC, four by ITV and one by Channel 4, and their success in homes paying the costs of access to the multi-channel universe seems to indicate the continuing popularity of the 'old' providers in the face of competition from new services.

Given that one of Ofcom's main duties, from the point-of-view of government, is to encourage the migration of television households from analogue to digital reception, it is perhaps unsurprising to find an emphasis in Ofcom's statistics on viewing habits within multi-channel, digital homes; these are seen to be the forward-looking trend-setters. However, as also seems obvious to all but the technologically obsessed, audiences wish to watch what they consider to be good programmes rather than digital programmes per se. Any balanced assessment of the cultural significance of the multi-channel revolution in the UK therefore requires some awareness of the relative popularity and use of the various old and new channels. The percentage share figures for the five terrestrial channels, as well as for the top five most popular non-terrestrial channels ('other' channels) are therefore given in Tables 1 and 2.

While it is important to recognize that the share of viewing that goes to the new commercial channels is still rising, it also seems to be the case that the majority of the audience continue to recognize the value of the older free-to-air services, as well as of the new, and free, BBC digital services. This is substantiated by the accelerated take-up of the Freeview service (providing access for analogue homes to the BBC's and other's free-to-air, non-subscription digital services). Regarding the relative popularity of new and old, an inspection of the figures below indicates that the most watched of the non-terrestrial channels (Sky One) has less than half of the audience for the least watched of the terrestrials (Channel 5). It may also be worth noting that it is the terrestrials that are defined as 'public service broadcasting' by the Communications Act, and that it is these channels, taken together, that retain a majority share of the audience.

Table 1. Total TV viewing audience share percentage (terrestrial and 'other' channels, 2003)

BBC 1	25.6
ITV	23.7
Other	23.6
BBC 2	11.0
Channel 4	9.6
Channel 5	6.5

Source: Ofcom, *Is Television Special?*, p. 43.

Table 2. Top five 'other' channels: audience share as percentage of total TV viewing (2003)

Sky One	2.9
Sky Sports One	1.8
ITV2	1.6
UK Gold	1.5
Cbeebies	1.2

Source: Ofcom, Annex to *Is Television Special?*, Figure 35.

In considering these audience share figures it may also be helpful to be aware of the overall breakdown of television revenues in Britain. Ofcom's figures indicate that total revenue in 2002 – for all channels – was around £7.6 billion. These figures are made up of Net Advertising Revenue at around £3.15 billion; subscription income at around £2.00 billion; the television component of the licence fee at around £1.80 billion; and other income, including sponsorship, at around £0.65 billion.[44]

By 2004 the benchmark figure of fifty per cent of UK households with access to digital television had been passed, with around forty-five per cent having access to the internet.[45] However, as the audience share figures given above indicate, the 'old' terrestrial channels continue to attract the majority of viewing. As already suggested, the Oliver and Ohlbaum Report gives some indication of why this might be the case. There are three important factors noted in the Report: firstly, the transmission costs of the new channels are disproportionately high; secondly, the new channels spend relatively small amounts on new programming (although significant amounts are spent on acquiring sports and film rights), and thirdly, a larger proportion of the BBC licence fee income finds its way into programme production compared with the proportions of television advertising revenue or subscription that are spent on production.

Regarding digital transmission costs and the use of cable and satellite platforms, the Report points out that much of the value of advertising and subscription income, used to support the new channels, is swallowed up in the costs of transmission or delivery. As a result of this, less money – proportionately – is available to invest in making new programmes.[46] Regarding the general cost-effectiveness and beneficial effects of licence fee money, the Report argues firstly that the level of BBC investment in original programmes requires competitors to keep pace with such investment and secondly that any reduction in licence fee payments and consequent increase in advertising income would result in proportionately less investment in original programming (as opposed to repeats or imports).

There are some complicated calculations and hypotheses behind these assertions, but they seem generally to rest on an analysis that, whereas some seventy per cent of BBC income goes into making new television

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47 Ibid., pp. 32–3.

48 Ibid., p. 25 and Department for
Culture, Media and Sport, *Review
of the BBC's Royal Charter. A
Strong BBC, Independent of
Government* (The Green Paper)
(London: DCMS, 2005), p. 48.

49 Oliver and Ohlbaum, p. 3.

programmes, only fifty per cent of commercial income on ITV, Channel 4 and Channel 5 (combined) finds its way into original production. The proportion for pay TV channels is much less than this, as we shall see. The rather complicated arguments in the Report can perhaps be better represented by the more familiar view that, in the ecology of British broadcasting, audience expectations are raised, and programming standards maintained, because the BBC is such a significant investor in the making of new (not repeated or imported) programmes.[47]

In their introduction the authors point out that the amounts invested in television in Britain are very high, considered in global terms. Significantly more is spent on television, on a per capita basis, than for example in France or in Germany, and the recent government Green Paper on the future of the BBC suggests that Britain invests a higher proportion of its Gross Domestic Product in television than any other country in the world (including the USA, although the size of the USA means that its programme market is vastly larger than that in the UK).[48] In part as a result of this, some seventy-five per cent of the terrestrial television programmes shown in Britain are also made in Britain. Oliver and Ohlbaum compare this with a British share of the domestic cinema market of some twenty per cent (the other eighty per cent being devoted to imported American films).[49] The figures showing proportions of indigenous and imported programming on the five terrestrial channels are given in Table 3.

However, it is the figures on programme spend by the British pay TV channels which are perhaps of most interest and which may explain the continuing popularity of the terrestrial 'big spenders'. These figures should be treated with some caution as they derive from 2001, and it is clear – at least from intentions announced in the trade press – that the bigger pay TV channels intend to increase their proportion of spend on original and more prestigious programming.

Oliver and Ohlbaum calculate that the total revenue for all Britain's pay TV channels in 2001 was around £3.4 billion (with £2.9 billion coming from subscriptions and £0.5 billion from advertising). Of this total of £3.4 billion they calculate that nearly half of this amount went on delivery costs (some £1.6 billion) and some £1 billion on film and sports rights. This left around £0.8 billion for all other costs including

Table 3. Split of indigenous vs imported programming on the UK terrestrial channels, 2002

	New indigenous programmes (%)	Indigenous repeats (%)	TV and film imports (%)
BBC 1	70	12	18
BBC 2	47	28	25
ITV	72	9	19
C4	47	20	33
C5	35	23	42

Source: Oliver and Ohlbaum Report, p. 22. BBC, ITC, DGA, O&O analysis.

administration. Of this remaining amount the Report calculates that some £400 million was spent on non-sport and non-film programming. Just under half of this amount – around £150 million – was spent on UK programming. One-third of this (or £50 million) was spent on repeats and this left around £100 million to spend on commissioning new UK programmes. If Oliver and Ohlbaum are approximately right, then the new, pay TV channels – taken together – are spending just under three per cent of their income on commissioning new UK programmes (in addition to all sports and film programming).[50]

50 Ibid., pp. 3 and 22.

This, of course, is one very particular account of significant trends in the ever-expanding audiovisual sphere. It is not an account that is foregrounded in Ofcom's telling of the tale of contemporary broadcasting, and it is easy to see how the Oliver and Ohlbaum version is motivated by BBC self-interest, but a disinterested observer might also conclude that the UK citizens and consumers making use of these services might also find this account illuminating, just as some have found Freeview a useful alternative to pay TV.

It is impossible to do justice to a large organization like Ofcom in one short article. The range and detail of the empirical data that it generates is impressive and puts most comparable academic research in the shade. It is a very big beast in the jungle with considerable powers for good or ill, but by February 2005 some distinguishing characteristics have emerged. Ofcom must inevitably prioritize government commands to make the UK 'home to the most dynamic and competitive communications and media market in the world',[51] and it is required to do everything in its power to facilitate the creation of 'digital Britain'. In the field of television this has effectively meant supporting the roll-out of digital services that (with the exception of the BBC's new digital channels) are predominantly subscription-based. This support, developed within the framework of the dominant market rhetoric of competition, has brought it uncomfortably close to being the cheerleader for these new commercial services, and it is possible to see its early regulatory actions in allowing ITV to reduce the range and quality of its regional and children's services as an action that puts the interests of the television business ahead of the interests of television users.

51 Department of Trade and Industry and Department for Culture, Media and Sport, *A New Future for Communications*, Cmnd 5010 (The White Paper) (Norwich: The Stationery Office, 2000), p. 10.

It is arguably the case that the twin factors of the drive to digital and a fascination with market transformation have had the effect of flicking off a key switch in the Ofcom institutional brain. This off-switch is currently set against four key issues: the communication requirements of citizenship, the cultural quality, value and impact of television programmes, the support measures required for creative, critical and innovative programme-making and the 'value for money' represented not just by the BBC but also by the other 'free to air' broadcasters.

In assessing future performance the biggest 'faultline' to watch is probably Ofcom's unfolding relationship with the BBC. For these two organizations there is a continuing sense in which 'this town ain't big enough for both of us' and some critics and commercial competitors of

the BBC have proposed that the Corporation be brought under the regulatory control of Ofcom. This proposal, although formally rejected by the regulator, nonetheless provides the 'deep story' behind Ofcom's Phase 3 report on public service television, published in February 2005. The February report remained very quiet about the contribution made by the BBC-supported 'Freeview' service in enabling more households to creep into the digital world without significant additional payment and bypassing the subscription route to change, and Ofcom confirmed its proposal that there should be a new competitor to the BBC: the 'Public Service Publisher'.[52] However, in also proposing that this new institution might be funded by the re-routing of some portion of the BBC's licence fee it suggests, in my view, that the BBC's right hand might work better if its left foot were cut off, and the proposal appears to endorse the views of those critics and commercial competitors, including News International, who have been arguing since the mid-1980s that the BBC should be financially diminished and politically contained. Of course this is not the publicly stated rationale, and the case not unreasonably advanced by Ofcom is that audiences will be better served by the provision of a new public service competitor to the BBC, but there is, as yet, no legal framework in place for the creation of this new body.

In the light of the findings of the Hutton Report, the general fall-out over coverage of the war in Iraq, and the expression of the Prime Minister's severe displeasure with the BBC, the surprise of 2005 is perhaps the government's Green Paper on the renewal of the BBC's Royal Charter.[53] This makes it clear that – whatever manoeuvrings have been taking place behind closed doors – the BBC will retain its institutional independence, possibly being established for the first time as an independent Trust, and it will retain the full value of its licence fee, at least for the next few years.[54] Perhaps Ofcom will tolerate this Trust; perhaps it will reinvigorate its own Content Board in addressing citizenship issues and concerns. We shall see.

What is certain is that, in the ethos generated in the new Faulty Towers on the south bank of the Thames, there is an inability or unwillingness to see that it is the lauded and arguably most competitive television that invests the least in original production. This is one of neoliberalism's blind spots and, in the field of culture, the policies that flow from this will inevitably have damaging consequences.

52 *Phase 3 Report*, pp. 68–80.

53 *Review of the BBC's Royal Charter* (The Green Paper), p. 3.

54 Ibid.

The non-democratic regulator: a response to Sylvia Harvey

DON REDDING

Sylvia Harvey's cultural critique of Ofcom's lack of 'grip' on broadcasting content is sharp and accurate, but Ofcom's approach is not born of perversity. It sees the world in different terms, and to understand why, we must go outside the 'special case' approach to broadcasting as a stand-alone industry. Here we find the economic and cultural conditions for the consumption of audiovisual culture changing rapidly. Ofcom sees itself as both a child of communications 'convergence', and as a progenitor of further such change.
The Communciations Act 2003 conceived Ofcom as the regulator of 'convergence' industries. It brought together telecommunications, broadcasting, the internet and related industries in one sector.

While the nature and impact of convergence remains debatable – Sylvia Harvey correctly notes people's remarkable loyalty to 'traditional', 'quality' TV – there is no doubt that it is now accelerating, with crucial impetus given by the digitization of audiovisual (AV) content. TV-quality pictures have now joined music, text, audio and graphics in their ease of mass digitization and interoperability. Digital AV is now on tap in most people's homes in the UK. Digital TV and broadband internet are almost universally available. Their costs have fallen and take-up is rising. At the time of writing (September 2005):

- Over six million UK households – a quarter of the total – have residential broadband connections.[1]
- Digital satellite TV, similar cable services or the digital terrestrial Freeview service are in 62% of households.[2]

1 Ofcom.

2 Ofcom.

- The BBC and ITV have announced plans for a free digital satellite service.
- The government is planning subsidised Freeview boxes, as the UK aims for universal digital TV by 2012.

Digital radio is also nearing universal availability and digital radio channels are expected to offer increasing amounts of information along with their sound – including moving pictures. With over eighty per cent of people using mobile phones, there is rapid innovation in bringing AV to these and other mobile devices.

The powers behind these changes are, in terms of investment, telecommunications companies and consumer electronics manufacturers and, in terms of innovation, a host of broadband providers and internet-related AV content suppliers. These new entrants believe that the future lies with widely available, extensively personalized and on-demand audiovisual services. The broadband industries recently opined that, by 2010, *all* serious large companies would be providers of 'audiovisual content services', even if it was just to market themselves via broadband internet.[3] Thus, television, in economic terms, is losing its 'special place', and being seen as a small division of a bigger 'communications market'. In 2005 this market generated £47.4 billion of retail revenues in the UK. Less than a quarter (£10.1 billion) belonged to broadcasting, with £36.1 billion going to telecommunications.[4] In response, the traditional broadcasters are changing. The BBC, the UK's largest broadcaster, is now a multi-platform operator with two terrestrial and six digital TV channels, four analogue and six digital radio channels, and Europe's best-used portfolio of websites. Its traditional competitors are also proliferating: ITV has four TV channels (three digital), as does Channel 4. The BBC offers archived radio programmes on demand online, and will add TV programmes from 2006. This is a future where TV increasingly does not look like itself – but everything looks like TV.

Those of us who wish to fight for a progressive cultural policy relating to broadcasting must consider how this can be achieved in this rapidly changing context. One answer has been proposed by the European Commission. It suggests extending existing regulation of 'traditional' TV to cover *all* providers of 'TV-like' audiovisual content services including those delivered through the internet.[5] These industries would find themselves subject to a range of regulation to protect minors and human dignity, to separate advertising from editorial, and to give a right to reply, among other things. Some could even face the mandatory investment quotas for European and for independent content production. The telecoms and broadband providers are up in arms, with Ofcom alongside, and even traditional broadcasters like the BBC are dubious, since it is now part of the BBC's core mission to work through new digital media. This UK response to the EC proposals shows how deeply negative the industry's perception of content regulation has become. It is seen primarily as a *threat* to innovative content services, rather than the positive cultural tool that

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Sylvia Harvey desires. As the industries involved, the regulator and the relevant departments of state overwhelmingly suggest *lighter* regulation as the way forward, those of us arguing for cultural public policy are easily tarred as 'pro-regulation' and 'living in the past'.

'Public Voice' – a UK coalition of voluntary sector umbrella associations and specialised non-profit media organizations – has tried to find new ways through this argument by developing some principled positions on what constitute 'citizens' interests' in the convergence world, and attempting to apply these to various regulatory developments. Our view is that it is vital to contest the future of regulation, otherwise we will rapidly lose concepts of public space, social benefit and public service in the communications sector. This is where the role and record of Ofcom cause concern. On key occasions Ofcom has shown itself to be, not a neutral arbiter, capable of balancing citizens' interests with market considerations, but a creature of the market, immune to other social influences, undermining the will of parliament and determined to drive its own policy prescriptions.

Let us go back a step. The Communications Act was Janus-faced. Looking one way, it promised open markets, competition and 'light touch' regulation to free Britain's 'creative industries'. Looking the other, it promised to protect the wider public interest, not least by safeguarding public service broadcasting (psb).[6] As Sylvia Harvey notes, the battle to insert a duty to further the interests of 'citizens', balancing those of consumers and markets, was the key policy fight during the Bill's passage. Although we won, it was thin protection. Crucially, since the 'citizens' wording was inserted by a vote of parliament against the government, the government never had to speak in its justification, so no legislative or parliamentary definition of 'citizens' interests in relation to communications' exists. When Ofcom struggled to align itself with the new wording, it was difficult to win arguments without a benchmark definition of what interests were at stake.

Ofcom's first move was to give itself a mission statement which, quite against the Act's careful separation, conflated 'citizens' and 'consumers' and signalled that both interests were best met by market competition. Its next move exposed the weakness in the detail of the Act's safeguards. The apparently strong sections referenced by Sylvia Harvey, specifying the 'purposes of public service television broadcasting', were disowned by Ofcom's chief executive, Stephen Carter. He dismissively noted that they were drawn from a BBC document 'drafted more than a decade ago', whereas 'the challenge is to "maintain and strengthen" public service broadcasting in circumstances very different from those prevailing when the excellent statutory objectives were first penned'.[7] Thus parliament, and the Act, were wrong. Ofcom was smarter, more modern, 'convergent' and forward-looking than the people's representatives. Ofcom felt if had to set new policy prescriptions. Its strategic psb review came up with new 'purposes' for psb and new 'remits' for the broadcasters, less than a year after the Act was passed.

6 For an account of how this two-faces approach fits within Labour's public policy, see David Hesmondhalgh, 'Media and cultural policy as public policy', *International Journal of Cultural Policy*, vol. 11, no. 1 (2005).

7 Speech to the Spring Conference of the Voice of the Listener and Viewer, London, 29 April 2004.

8 'The world on the box', University of Westminster for 3WE, 2004, available at http://www.ibt.org.uk/3WE

9 'Is Television Special?', Phase 1 of Ofcom's Strategic Review of Public Service Television Broadcasting (London: Ofcom, 2004).

10 A Strong BBC, Independent of Government, UK Government Green Paper, http://www.bbccharterreview.org.uk

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Ofcom felt free to ignore the democratic process. After 18 months of parliamentary scrutiny, debate in both Houses, and democratic representations, that decade-old drafting was much altered and improved. My coalition, the Third World and Environment Broadcasting Project (3WE), had successfully persuaded the government to include a line requiring programming on 'matters of international significance or interest'. The wording on children's programmes, religious programmes and regional programmes and production had all changed significantly. However, Ofcom knew better. Its suggested 'purposes' were based on general notions, rather than specific regulatory requirements. Not surprisingly, industry liked that approach. When 3WE demonstrated, through authoritative research,[8] that despite the Act, broadcasters were dropping their programming on matters of international interest, Ofcom turned a blind eye. This particular requirement was not mentioned in Ofcom's public service broadcasting review; others were dropped or lightened. The signals were clear: Ofcom had little interest in 'positive' content regulation. Its mind was elsewhere: 'We believe that, in the future, public service broadcasting will no longer be needed to ensure consumers can buy and watch their own choice of programming'. Therefore 'Achieving [digital] switchover should be given preference over some of the more marginal obligations currently placed on commercial terrestrial broadcasters'. Meanwhile, since 'the market is likely to produce significant amounts of programming which meet both the purposes and characteristics of psb' we should see how public intervention could be reduced.[9] These statements about the future were beliefs and assertions – that is, ideology. They did not rest on evidence, nor address the structural failures in the market – including platform dominance, rights monopolies and vertical integration in pay-TV – that would prevent the arrival of this perfect consumer heaven. Rather, Ofcom has concentrated on reforming psb, the better to suit the wider market.

Ofcom has attempted some positive action, notably its innovative proposal for a new, mainly broadband, public service provider. Without waiting for, or desiring, a wider public policy debate, Ofcom propelled this work forward, including a suggested launch date and preparations for eventual commercial tendering. Previous new entrants to public service broadcasting, such as Channel 4, have been the result of extensive policy debate and primary legislation, including careful discussion of their purposes and their impact on the psb ecology.

Most egregious was Ofcom's approach to the BBC. Here the psb review examined a number of policy alternatives but neutrally said that it was 'for government to decide'. Having listened to this, but also to other evidence including a public consultation, government did decide – to protect the future of a 'strong, independent BBC' through a new ten-year Charter, a not-too-radical reform of governance and retention of the licence fee.[10] Ofcom quickly and publicly told the government it was wrong: the BBC's governance structure should be further removed, its funding reviewed as soon as possible and mechanisms created to split licence fee

money with other broadcasters (including, presumably, those whom Sylvia Harvey cites as making little contribution to indigenous production).[11]

In these examples we see Ofcom usurping public policy. Ofcom itself is therefore becoming the policy battleground. Yet Ofcom is not a democratic space. It is an industrial regulator which enjoys pow-wows with captains of industry and 'radical' (read, 'free market') thinkers. Broadcasting is only one segment of its stakeholder constituency. Other industries are more powerful. It has little time for its civil society stakeholders and no motivation to use them as a counterbalance to industrial interests. Its public consultations have been largely fruitless for civil society. Ofcom simply ignored a significant number of responses to its first annual plan that strongly objected to its conflation of citizens and consumers. There is no structure of social dialogue beyond these consultations. Public Voice has lobbied for Ofcom to get closer to civil society stakeholders, but it prefers the unrepresentative, obscure and apparently toothless advisory panels that satisfy the minimum requirements of the Act, and which include its own, non-independent Content Board.

At the time of writing, Ofcom is reviewing its approach to 'citizens' interests'. Public Voice has asked for a comprehensive, inclusive and consensual dialogue with all stakeholders, including civil society, to identify and define for the first time what those interests are, across the range of communications services, but we are not optimistic.

What the last four years – legislation, followed by a convergence regulator – have shown us is that if, like Sylvia Harvey, we care about cultural production, its nature, quality and origins, and if we believe that public policy has a role to play in enabling the conditions for its creation, we face a series of challenges. Among these are:

- To understand the nature of the emerging markets, and their impact on traditional production and distribution industries as well as on user behaviour.
- To suggest new forms of positive action and regulation that are appropriate to pursuing cultural goals across these markets.
- To keep public cultural policy in the democratic domain, not in the hands of non-representative regulators who are liable to industrial 'capture'.

Neither national states nor their regulators can be relied upon to protect and promote the interests of citizens in the hyper-world of communications convergence. As users of information, we face the seduction of consumerism, but we also have available to us new and varied forms of subversion, free networking and potential control, at a micro-level, over means of production (the so-called 'user-generated content', including podcasts, weblogs, file-sharing, and so on). What remains uncertain is whether we can fashion together new social and producers' coalitions and lobby groups that are capable of asserting citizens' and the public interest with sufficient power to keep the Ofcoms of this brave new world on the right tracks.

Rune Waldekranz: Swedish pioneering film historian

ASTRID SÖDERBERGH WIDDING

1 Jean Mitry, *Histoire du cinéma, Art et industrie I, 1895–1914* (Paris: Editions universitaires, 1967); Georges Sadoul, *Histoire générale du cinéma – Le cinéma devient un art 1909–1920* (Paris: Denoël, 1952).

By the turn of the millennium, as cinema had celebrated its hundredth birthday and New Historicism had been established as a central methodological approach to film studies, the legacy left behind by the classical film historians of the first generation – Jean Mitry, Georges Sadoul – had also been critically revisited.[1] The globalizing general surveys of the historians of the old school, with their underlying teleological assumption that the new film medium had gone from strength to strength, suddenly appeared naive and simplistic with the emergence of new perspectives in film history – of micro-histories as well as of technological approaches to the medium. Moreover, with the establishment of new technologies like the VCR, which provided easy access to older film material, the many lapses of memory in the historical textbooks and the obvious misinterpretations that followed, the history of cinema obviously needed to be rewritten, and the early historians were often reduced to the role of springboards in academic texts, in order to demonstrate that much needed to be revised.

However, in the writing of film history, not only have there been significant shifts between historical paradigms, but there are also obvious language barriers, which means that several global histories of cinema have actually remained local, in the sense that they have only been accessible to the few who are in command of a minority language. Such is the case of the Swedish film historian Rune Waldekranz (1911–2003). Born only fifteen years after cinema came to Sweden, he shared with both Mitry and Sadoul the condition of being almost of the same age as the new medium. With a monumental film history in three volumes, from the beginnings to 1990 (2601 pages in all), Waldekranz is one of the most

2   Rune Waldekranz, *Filmens historia, De första hundra åren, Från zoopraxiscope till video*, vols 1–3 (Stockholm: Norstedts, 1985, 1986, 1995).

important first-generation historians.[2] However, his work is all the more interesting as it covers a wide range of fields within film culture, from film criticism, via scriptwriting and production, to academia.

As a young academic, Waldekranz started his career as a leading film critic in the late 1930s in *Svenska Dagbladet*, one of the most important Stockholm-based daily papers. As a critic, and writing under the signature Roderick, he was notable both for his enthusiasm and for his well-intentioned and yet often quite severe judgments if a film had nothing fresh or innovative to offer. 'Roderick' in fact was one of the truly original voices in Swedish film culture at the time, both internationally oriented and very familiar with Swedish and Nordic national cinemas and their specific traditions. It should therefore have come as no surprise that in 1942 Anders Sandrew – founder of the second largest Swedish film production company – recruited the thirty-one-year-old Waldekranz and made him chief of production. He stayed at the Sandrew company for more than twenty years, including the year when the famous Swedish film reform was launched, 1963, in which new policies for state subsidies were established and the Swedish Film Institute was founded.

During his years with Sandrew, Waldekranz became one of the legendary producers of Swedish film history. He acted as production manager for no less than 67 films, of which he himself produced more than 50. He also acted as scriptwriter for eight films, either alone or with Anders Henrikson under the signature 'de Canaille' and 'de Quelque Fleurs', a travesty of the well-known French authorial duo from the late nineteenth century, Gaston de Caillavet and Robert de Flers. However, Waldekranz also became a pioneer in the launching of international co-productions – a new trend in 1950s Swedish cinema – as well as of Swedish films intended for an international audience. In 1950, he went to Hollywood with two other Swedish producers to visit MPAA (Motion Pictures Association of America), and he returned with the conviction that now was the right time for a new golden age of Swedish cinema. Among the first films he produced was Alf Sjöberg's adaption of Strindberg's *Fröken Julie* (*Miss Julie*, 1950) – a project launched by Waldekranz – which has become one of the classics of Swedish cinema, as well as a good example of the new film wave aimed at international audiences. Waldekranz was also the producer of two Bergman films, *Gycklarnas afton* (*Sawdust and Tinsel*, 1953) and *Kvinnodröm* (*Dreams/Journey into Autumn*, 1955), as well as of Mai Zetterling's first feature, *Älskande par* (*Loving Couples*, 1964).

Waldekranz himself has written on these years and on his own role in Swedish film culture in the preface to the fifth volume of the Swedish Filmography.[3] It may seem inappropriate from a scholarly point of view for someone so involved in the film culture of the time to write such a preface. Waldekranz, however, is far from glorifying his own work at the expense of others; on the contrary, he scrupulously accounts for his former competitors' works during the decade. In a characteristically

3   Rune Waldekranz, 'Kriser och kransar i 1950-talets svenska film', *Svensk Filmografi*, vol. 5 (1950–9), pp. 9–29.

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4 Ibid., p. 29.

modest voice, he admits that he had been wrong in predicting a new golden age, but still argues that his prediction was not entirely mistaken, since it was during the 1950s that Ingmar Bergman first reached out to an international audience. He concludes, however, in a rather grander register: 'This is indeed no unimportant matter – a royal oak, with its rich and powerful foliage, had taken root and found power of growth in the barren soil of Swedish film.'[4]

In 1964, Rune Waldekranz became founding director of Sweden's first film school, part of the Swedish Film Institute and established as a result of the film reform, a hothouse with the aim of fostering a new generation of directors. The film school thus was a vital part of the so-called new wave of Swedish cinema in the 1960s. The winding up of the film school by the end of the decade, when it was transferred to the Dramatic Institute, may have contributed to Waldekranz's choice of a further new field of activities. After having completed his licentiate thesis in 1969, devoted to the first ten years of Swedish cinema from 1896 to 1906, Waldekranz was finally appointed the first full professor of film studies in Sweden at Stockholm University in 1970, his department being situated at the newly built Film House, together with the Swedish Film Institute and several other practical and theoretical institutions related to theatre and film culture. Here, he played a central role in establishing the new academic subject of cinema studies, with a double focus from the beginning, both on individual films or directors and on cinema culture in general. In this function, he also supervised many scholars from the first Swedish generation of academics within cinema studies, such as Jan Olsson from Lund University, who defended his doctoral thesis in 1979 and later became one of Waldekranz's successors as Professor at Stockholm University. Even after Waldekranz's retirement as professor, he returned as supervisor for several dissertations, thus contributing actively to the development of the new discipline across several decades. Waldekranz also continued to play a vital part in the Swedish Film Academy to the end of his life.

To evaluate Waldekranz's importance as film historian is no easy task. His monumental film history is divided into three parts: the first deals with the pioneering age 1880–1920; the second, called 'The Golden Age', spans 1920–40; and the third volume covers world cinema in the period 1940–90 – a quite impossible task. The best volume among the three is without a doubt the first. Waldekranz himself had devoted most of his own research to this period, and although he sometimes adopts a traditional teleological perspective, his discussions are remarkable, especially of what he calls 'cinema before cinema', but also of the different aspects of the early years of cinema's establishment, from the first attempts of the 'period of craftsmanship' to the 'first industrial epoch'. Although the book is written in a traditional way, as a seamless account of a series of causal developments, it is striking to what extent Waldekranz succeeds in rendering many of the complexities and contradictions of early film history. With the second volume, however, a

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slight change of perspective can be noted. Here, the cinephile seems to take over from the scholar. It was during these years that Waldekranz himself discovered the film medium, and this love for cinema appears throughout the book. As a learned filmgoer, he seems to be someone who goes to the movies out of passion rather than out of scholarly interest. Here, the perspective is less reflective and perhaps slightly less original than in the first volume, and more the work of a great storyteller who wants to communicate his version of film history. It still remains fascinating though, not least because of its deeper studies of certain periods – 'the roaring twenties of Hollywood' or the 'German painterly school', to take only two examples. The choice of periods may remain quite conventional, but nevertheless the different periods which are dealt with are presented in a very personal way. This is really Waldekranz's own film history, and it may therefore also be read from a meta-perspective: which films or periods had particularly impressed him? However, in the third volume, Waldekranz definitely tends to lose his focus in the overwhelming mass of facts concerning countries, directors and developments. Badly copy-edited, due to the publisher's hurry to get it out in 1995 for the celebration of 100 years of cinema, it was also badly received by the critics – indeed a sad finale for a man who devoted his entire life to film.

To do justice to the innovativeness of Waldekranz's work, it becomes clear that one should turn to his studies of early cinema. His unpublished licentiate thesis, 'Living Pictures: film and cinema in Sweden 1896–1906', which seeks to investigate and describe the pioneering years when the film medium was established, is no less than a scholarly masterpiece.[5] It covers a range of perspectives, from sophisticated archival history to an analysis of the relations between film and its audiences as well as society in general. During the past decade, the revival of interest in early cinema has led later Swedish scholars to rediscover and re-evaluate the importance of this early work. A later book, *Så föddes filmen* (The Birth of Cinema), is also a minor classic in its contextualizing of early cinema *avant la lettre*, before the new historians made it their task, both in relation to entertainment culture and to modern technology, to theatre melodrama and to pre-cinema.[6] In the last essay that Waldekranz published, for the centenary of cinema, he returns to the question at the heart of his own work: the new film medium and its relation to modernity, or as he put it, to the age of technics.[7] Whether it is rockets, motor vehicles, trains, aviation or even computers, cinema seems to have enjoyed a privileged relationship with them all, revealing an important aspect of the medium in itself: that it lends itself to intimate relationships with all possible modern technical devices. Towards the end of the article, Waldekranz speaks prophetically of this 'hitherto only anticipated world', which, according to him, will nevertheless leave room for the collective experience of moving images within the institution of cinema.

5 Rune Waldekranz, 'Levande fotografier, Film och biograf i Sverige 1896–1906', unpublished thesis (1969), The Library of the Swedish Film Institute.

6 Rune Waldekranz, *Så föddes filmen* (Stockholm: Norstedts, 1976).

7 Rune Waldekranz, 'Filmens spegling av teknikens tidsålder', *Filmen 100 år, Tekniska museets årsbok* (Stockholm: Daedalus, 1996), pp. 1–30.

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It remains clear that Waldekranz in many respects appears as a strikingly modern historian. Many of his works in fact anticipate discussions that later historians claim to have invented. His analysis of the history of early cinema and its complex connections to modernity is both precise and profound. For everyone who has read (or has had linguistic access to) Waldekranz, it is not only the periodicity or the general approaches to film history that they may consequently feel need revision, but also the meta-aspects of film history, which tend to privilege new approaches and perhaps overestimate their importance in relation to so-called 'old' or 'classical' history. The example of Waldekranz demonstrates not only that the linguistic barrier needs to be surmounted in the field of film history, but also that 'old history' may be just as vital as the very newest.

Janet Thumim, *Inventing Television Culture: Men, Women and the Box.* **Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004, 218 pp.**

William Boddy, *New Media and Popular Imagination: Launching Radio, Television and Digital Media in the United States.* **Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004, 184 pp**.

JAMES BENNETT

The Oxford Television Studies series has consistently produced books that address matters pertinent to the field of television studies, filling in lacunas and proposing ways forward for those involved in the discipline. With the recent addition of these two publications, the series is beginning to have the feel of an important corpus for television studies, providing any reader with a comprehensive overview of the development of television's forms, the debates and issues it raises. To this end Thumim's discussion of early television culture, together with Jason Jacobs's earlier work in this area[1], and Boddy's historical account of television's transition to a digital technology, might be thought of as neatly 'book ending' this important collection in relation to the chronological survey the series provides. Both books challenge 'natural' assumptions about television that conceive it as an inherently passive, gendered, live and ephemeral medium. By investigating various intertextual ephemera (ranging from advertising to archived interviews and from production notes to popular fictions) from different periods in the development of television, these two histories provide rich material for understanding television's positioning within cultural life, particularly at this pertinent moment of digitalization in both the USA and UK.

Thumim's book seeks to examine the formative period of UK broadcasting, between 1955 and 1965, detailing the development of particular production practices, presumptions about audiences, aesthetics

1 Jason Jacobs, *The Intimate Screen: Early British Television Drama* (Oxford and New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2000).

and the insertion of television into everyday life. Her overarching concern is with gender and her concluding remarks on the continued inferior treatment of women represented in and on television reverberate loudly as television enters the digital age. Whilst Thumim sets out to challenge some of the prevailing assumptions about early television, interestingly *Inventing Television Culture* tends to describe many of these, giving the reader a historically grounded account of how some of the widespread presuppositions about television as a media technology have taken hold. In particular, her extensive use of written archival material to detail the displacement of the feminine from factual programming dovetails usefully with the apparent rise in popular drama's address to this audience.

Organized into chapters that broadly reflect these themes (the rise of competition, women, drama and factual programming), *Inventing Television Culture* marks an increasing concern within television studies to dust off the wealth of archival material in existence in the UK. This retrieval illustrates that whilst there are nuances to be observed in the prevailing assumptions that exist about this period of television's history, attitudes on display in the archival sources do generally reinforce and confirm how we think issues of class and gender played out in the production of particular genres and, indeed, production cultures of television organizations. Although Thumim wants our assumptions about how these issues structured production cultures to be unfounded, her use of archival sources (newspaper reviews, written archives from the BBC and ITV, scheduling, viewer responses and occasional television texts, although these often only in transcript) gradually reveals how the BBC often took an elitist tone and production cultures more generally remained overwhelmingly male-dominated. Initially, she reluctantly admits that, between the BBC's and ITV's approaches to their audiences, although 'class as a differentiating factor was rarely, if ever, mentioned explicitly . . . [it] was a constant presence underlying the competitive war of words between supporters and detractors of the rival broadcasting systems as well as in criticism of particular programming' (p. 28). This is often realized in the uncovering of some fascinating archival sources, most notably from Eric Maschwitz, BBC Head of Light Entertainment Television (in submission to the Pilkington Committee) who, in denouncing ITV, asserted 'Commercial TV dare [sic] very seldom risk such adventures into the "avant garde"; its *peasant audience* does not respond to adventure of this kind' (emphasis added, p. 72).

Later in the book, her research points to the unsurprising marginalization of women in the production sphere, particularly in factual programming. Ironically, however, exploring the position of various high-profile women in television (particularly the BBC) leads Thumim to draw out the often painful dynamic whereby women working in a robustly defended 'male world' inevitably reproduce this rhetoric. Thus, whilst Grace Wyndham Goldie (Assistant Head of Talks) was brought into the BBC by Mary Adams, she replicated the gendered

specificity of working roles, nurturing a group of young professional men labelled 'Gracie's Boys' to run the corporation's current affairs programming. The example of Goldie is paradigmatic of Thumim's overall argument, which traces the unease with which the female audience and workforce were treated by television, thus creating and maintaining a distinct contrast between drama and factual programming and their differently 'gendered' address. Interestingly, her discussion of the latter of these 'genres' points to the importance and prominence that the magazine format has always had on television. The characterization of early current affairs as belonging to the magazine format makes a particularly compelling case study for understanding the establishment of a dichotomy between hard, serious, masculine programming and entertaining, frivolous female programming. As she concludes,

> the magazine form attempted to secure audiences through deployment of variety in content and address, and as popular drama increasingly allowed the foregrounding of (some) female experience, the current affairs operation became ever more masculinist, allying itself with news at the very centre of the television institution (p. 188).

Despite this, Thumim wants to believe in the transformatory powers of television, arguing that 'television contributed more substantially than any other cultural form to changes in expectations of, and attitudes to, women's place in British society' (p. 193).

This final point notwithstanding, part of the problem with *Inventing Television Culture* is that the story told is a familiar one, although this should not negate the value of the detail of the research produced to uncover material that provides a basis for many assumptions about television. However, it is worth commenting on the problems with this type of historical work, particularly in relation to the discussion of television texts themselves. Thumim's discussion of drama, particularly 'developing the televisual' and 'fitness for screen and audience', has a close relationship to Jason Jacobs's work on early television drama, the book with which this volume might easily be paired, following on, as it does, from Jacobs's period of study. Television's characterization as a passive medium has owed much to the assumptions made about early television programming and reception in the period that Thumim examines. She challenges both the entwinement of this assumption with discourses of the feminine and the conception of television as simply a 'relay technology' and thus aesthetically uninteresting. In turn, she thereby contributes to the growing interest in, and defence of, television aesthetics within the field of television studies, the value of her work in this area complementing Jacobs's assertion that innovation and quality production practices have always been a part of the television landscape.

However, given her criticism of Jacobs's conclusions as to television's relationship with live theatre and his assertions of quality drama's concern with 'majority concerns', it is somewhat disappointing that her own material in this area is not more convincing. Whilst her unearthing

of material from the archives is interesting, valuable and engaging work, the reliance on newspaper reviews and interview notes with producers seems particularly problematic in these sections. At times, therefore, we are given fascinating insights into the cultural history of the two defining corporations within the British television landscape, but these are often left to stand as ends in themselves. When Thumim does move beyond the mere recounting of such material, her work becomes more engaging and her positioning of the Rochdale by-election as a key event in British television history deserves due prominence. As such, the problems I am identifying are often not with Thumim's own work so much as the way in which the book reveals the problems with such archival work, particularly where the TV texts themselves no longer exist or are not widely available; and here Jacobs's work is exemplary of the results possible. In some senses, therefore, this book stands as a call to action for television scholars to pressure for greater opening up of the television archive, particularly as held by the BBC and the BFI.

In contrast to Thumim's detailed account of one period, Boddy's *New Media and Popular Imagination* examines television not only across a number of pertinent moments in its development but also in relation to other media. Boddy marshals an impressive range of television ephemera to construct an argument that convincingly posits the current moment of digitalization as one in a line of many that need to be considered together in order to understand both the meaning of our own era's prospects and choices as well as the interests involved in shaping such choices. Taking Carolyn Marvin's twin understandings that 'media are not fixed natural objects' and that technologies have a special relationship to each other at the moment they are new, Boddy essentially provides an evolutionary account of twentieth-century media technologies.[2] From radio to cinema, cinema to television and television to digital media, his argument de-familiarizes our current understanding of each technology to show that a familiar set of fantasies and fears are articulated as new technologies emerge.

Similarly to Thumim, Boddy's account of these technologies has a particular interest in the address to and the construction of a gendered audience. In line with Hugh Mackay's work, which points to the need for all new domestic technologies to win time and space in the home, and Thumim's evidence, which demonstrates the female audience's importance in domesticating television (since women ordered the domestic sphere), Boddy's account is suggestive of the kind of tensions around gender that have proliferated across the history of consumer electronics.[3] Brian Winston's earlier account of media technologies described how radio's development as a broadcast technology was borne out of recognizing that 'a major perceived fault of the technology, that anybody could listen in, was actually its *raison d'etre*'.[4] Boddy's achievement here is to clearly detail the disappointment with which this transition was met by the early male radio enthusiast, who, having taken to radio as 'hobbyist', positioned its use as a masculine pastime, 'fishing'

2 Carolyn Marvin, *When Old Technologies Were New: Thinking about Electric Communication in the Late Nineteenth Century* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1988), p. 8.

3 Hugh Mackay, 'Consuming communication technologies in the home', in Hugh Mackay (ed.), *Consumption and Everyday Life* (London: Sage, 1997).

4 Brian Winston, *Media Technology and Society: A History: From The Telegraph to the Internet* (London: Routledge, 1998), p. 75.

for signals from other enthusiasts. Boddy traces, in a cycle that repeats itself across the history of television and its ancillary technologies, the feminization of the medium as the technological language of the enthusiast was replaced with both an appeal in marketing strategies to ideals of feminine emotion and a concern within trade and sales magazines to address the question of finding a space for the radio in the family home.

This cycle of tension between the address to a male or female audience then repeats itself as television enters the home and thus, by the time Boddy addresses the current discourses surrounding new technology, such rhetoric is convincingly positioned as 'not so new'. As a result the fantasized mobility that accompanies digital technologies, such as TiVo and VR, is shown as repetitious of discourses of mobility and activity that had accompanied both radio and analogue television's initial address to a male audience. Perhaps one criticism of Boddy's work is that the distinction he wants to achieve between television and cinema leads to a failure to link these discourses of television's technological mobility with similar rhetoric accompanying early cinema technologies, as discussed in Alison Griffiths's and Anne Friedberg's work.[5] However, the chronological structure of the book, tracing the re-emergence of these cycles of fantasy and fear, makes convincing reading. Indeed, the gendered cycle of new technologies is evident in the current UK television landscape, where interactive television's initial address to the male consumer, first trialled and promoted through sporting events, has recently shifted its attention to the female audience as SkyActive's 2005 rebrand depicts interactive television as a cosy space, filled with shopping, gossip and Gail Porter.

Importantly, *New Media and Popular Imagination* is not restricted simply to the representations that surround new technologies' inception, but casts its net much wider, bringing in economic, political and legal discourses that help the reader understand their shaping. The attention to legal regulation, spectrum use and allocation and, particularly in the final chapter, intellectual property issues, elucidates a field of research that is all too thinly covered by television studies. The digitalization of traditional forms of content, such as music, television and cinema, has resulted in a battlefield mentality by content owners, who are arguably using their economic, legal and industrial clout to restrict technological innovation and jeopardize legal doctrines such as 'fair use'. Whilst Boddy is cautious of championing one cause over another, his historical overview does demonstrate that

> these rhetorical antipodes of the passive and neutered domestic appliance versus the heroic and adventurous electronic tool have their roots . . . in the earliest conflicts between radio amateurs and early commercial broadcasters (p. 159).

However, this is not simply a case of retelling yet another aspect of the cycle of new media development. Rather, as he concludes in this chapter,

5   Alison Griffiths, 'Journeys for those who can not travel: promenade cinema and the museum life group', *Wide Angle*, vol. 18, no.3 (1996), pp. 53–84; Anne Friedberg, *Window Shopping: Cinema and Postmodernism* (Berkley, CA: University of California Press, 1993).

the voracious 'protection' of copyright by content owners threatens not only 'the widespread consumer practices of time- and space-shifting . . . but also many of the quotidian and fundamental practices undertaken by media scholars and educators' (p. 164). Thus, similarly to Thumim, Boddy's book can also be read as a call to action for media scholars to engage in these debates lest we become, as Boddy terms it, copyright's 'most conspicuous victims' (p. 164).

Histories of the social shaping of television are not new within the field; Lynn Spigel, Jeffrey Sconce, Brian Winston and William Uricchio have all written detailed accounts of the various imaginings, positioning and exploitation of the medium.[6] Boddy's research clearly fits alongside such work and his investigation of these significant moments of rupture and contestation is original and deserving of critical attention. Overall, what the book points to is the enduring relevance of Raymond Williams's work to the field of television studies, as it his work that all these historians recognize as indicating the way in which the introduction of any new media is a site of 'contestation' and 'choice' for old business and regulatory models, viewing patterns and everyday life.[7] Boddy's book therefore provides a useful starting point for beginning to understand the challenges and contestations that will accompany the switchover to digital television in the USA and the UK.

6 Lynn Spigel, *Make Room for TV* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1992); Jeffrey Sconce, *Haunted Media: Presence from Telegraphy to Television* (Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 2000); Brian Winston, *Media Technology and Society: A History – From The Telegraph to the Internet* (London: Routledge, 1998); and William Uricchio, 'Old media as new media: television', in Dan Harries (ed.), *The New Media Book* (London: BFI Publishing, 2002).

7 Raymond Williams, *Communications* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1962).

Michael Renov, *The Subject in Documentary.* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004, 286 pp.

JOHN CORNER

The idea of 'subjectivity' exerts a complicating pressure upon documentary theory and practice in three rather different ways. First of all, it is posed as an obstacle to achieving the 'objectivity' of account that has often been seen as an essential if problematic element of the documentary project. However, recognition of the subjective as an inevitable and enriching dimension of documentary work rather than a problem to be contained by rigorous methods and technology is now the dominant attitude here. Secondly, subjectivity is seen as a thematic field in its own right, including the subjectivity of film and programme makers themselves in self-representation through images and voices. There is a new inclusiveness to be discerned here too, although there is also a residual sense that lingering for too long on subjective matters risks a possible divergence from principal documentary goals. At the art video end of documentary this is clearly less of an issue than with the production of broadcast television. Thirdly, there is the question of audience experience, which when put under scrutiny (and it could do with a lot more of this) can be seen to be a good deal more complicated than production ideas and hopes would often suggest.

Michael Renov has for a long time been a perceptive and eloquent historian and champion of the representation of the self and self-representation in factual filmmaking.[1] Along with this has gone an enthusiasm for tracing and celebrating how feelings as well as knowledge are produced by documentaries (what he calls the 'deep yet fugitive desire' at work in all cinematic vision). Like most documentary scholars, he has also been engaged with the question of the kinds and

1   There have been a number of others pursing the 'subjective' dimension productively for some time, including members of the 'Visible Evidence' group of documentary scholars for whose conferences and publications Renov has been one of the principle organizers. Another example would be many of the excellent chapters in Paula Rabinowitz's *They Must Be Represented* (London: Verso, 1994).

levels of 'truth' that documentaries can generate and convey. He thus
brings together all three aspects of the subjective noted above, although
the primary emphasis is on subjectivity as a theme and the
autobiographical strand of this. His book essentially collects together his
work across 20 years or so of writing and speaking on the topic and,
together with his revisions, retrospective comments and some new
material, it adds up to a fine and continuously engaging contribution to
documentary scholarship.

As with all such collections, the cumulative argument of a monograph
is exchanged for a more digressive design, returning to a core set of
issues by using different analytic ideas or different examples to tease
away at the complexities. This suits Renov's style well, relaxed but
theoretically ambitious, heuristic rather than assertive.

In his introduction, he sets up what seems to be the incontrovertible
case for paying more attention to questions of subjectivity in nonfiction,
although in doing so he also notes 'the waning of objectivity as a
compelling social narrative' (p. xvii). I wonder if this is not to go too far
in redressing an imbalance? We all know of the problems that the idea
of objectivity has run into, historically and then more recently (the
critique of objectivity now seems to be about the most banal move one
can make in humanities debate, frequently not progressed beyond the
initial, easy dismissal). However, the idea of 'waning' here seems to
fit into rather too relaxed a way of waving goodbye to something we
might need for good social and political reasons to hang on to and
continue to be 'compelled by', albeit in revised and problematized forms.
I would have welcomed a bit more on this uncomfortable suggestion
of a straight run-off between the objective and the subjective. It is, rather,
a newly perceived dynamics of redefinition and interplay that seems to be
prompted. Elsewhere, though, there is precisely that sense of interplay,
and an inclusive awareness of the varied functions of documentary,
brought out well in the idea of documentary spectatorship being itself
'multiple, even conflictual' (p. 108).

In addition to being an attractive writer himself, Renov has always had
a good eye for the perceptive citation. There are plenty of them dotted
throughout the book. For instance, concluding the introduction there is a
lengthy quote from Vertov about the Kino-eye (p. xxiv). However
familiar as a general reference point this 1923 text is, Renov allows us to
re-engage with the sheer kinetic joy of the local formulations (e.g. 'Now
and forever, I free myself from human immobility, I am in constant
motion, I draw near, and then away from objects, I crawl under, I climb
onto them . . .') and the continuing truths they signal about our affective
relationship to the object world through the moving image. Just a few
pages earlier, in discussing the history of the tension between aesthetic
and social factors in documentary production, he cites Joris Ivens talking
about the making of *Borinage* in 1934. Ivens notes how his team felt it
necessary to destroy 'a certain unwelcome, superficial beauty' that
seemed to be generated by some of the physical locations to be shot: 'our

aim was to prevent agreeable photographic effects distracting the audience from the unpleasant truths we were showing' (p. xix). As with the earlier quote, the resonant implications of the comments cited (here, an aesthetic denial so strong it seeks to suppress even that element of the beautiful that creeps in by happenstance) exceed the suggestive points that Renov draws from them, as he knows they will.

Questions concerning the autobiographical text and its varied aesthetic devices find a place in most chapters. As he indicates, a concern with achieving a measure of stability and determinateness through pursuing kinds of self-documentation is now more than ever in tension with the idea that the self is multiple and contradictory. The documented self may gain both its therapeutic and its public value as much from the vista of unexplored, uninviting and discontinuous territories it opens up as from any coordinates and boundaries it manages to establish in the service of clearer identity. Nevertheless, the idea of self-representation as, in part, a search for the 'essential' inside story will continue to exert its pull.

Autobiography generally presents us with the situation of subjectivity being documented subjectively, in opposition to the case in many documentaries, where the realm of subjectivity and selfhood is either severely suppressed in the interests of strategic information flow (much documentary journalism in its treatment of case-studies and interviewees, for instance) or objectified for entertainment (as in much reality television).

Among many other things, the chapters look at how the radical documentary collective Newsreel constructed a political imaginary in the late 1960s, stereotyping of the Japanese across five decades, and documentary in relation to death and mourning, desire, digitalization and new currents in ethnography. There is a range of work on modes of the autobiographical, including video confessions and personal websites, and a selection of more detailed studies of films that have attracted Renov's particular attention. Among the latter, he offers a suggestive reading of Wexler's 1969 feature film *Medium Cool*, looking at how, set within the disturbances following the 1968 Chicago Democratic National Convention, it shows a rare privileging of 'history over diegesis'. Its refusal to relate the historical to the fictional by well-crafted containment, or 'incorporation', produces a collision of discourses which marks it as 'innovative political art' (p. 38). Renov's first draft of the paper that became this chapter was written over ten years ago, and the interest in looking at how feature fiction variously deploys its 'documentary' materials, appropriating them to the narrative by fair means and foul but sometimes also attempting to give them a more independent discursive impact, could certainly be brought to bear profitably on films since.

Among its many pointers, Renov's work indicates the value of exploring further the way in which different autobiographical strategies are deployed in documentaries with other kinds of generic ambition in

review

view. Recent successes could be used to illustrate the range opened up here. Morgan Spurlock's *Supersize Me* (2004) featured the filmmaker's own body and mind as a test-site for an experiment on the health risks posed by fast food. Autobiography and empathetic design were recruited to the service of a relatively straight exercise in radical exposition. Andrew Jarecki's *Capturing the Friedmans* (2003) drew extensively on the bizarre filmic self-representations of the Friedmans themselves, the audiovisual archive of family history, in producing his remarkable and discomforting case-study. In Britain, Kevin Macdonald's mountaineering epic *Touching the Void* (2003) used interview testimony about an accident and an extraordinary solo attempt at self-preservation to produce a film that was partly an outdoor adventure movie, partly something deeper about subjectivity under extreme stress and partly a melodrama about apparently broken trust.

A re-engagement with questions of subjectivity will be a significant part of the development of documentary studies. It will extend beyond the kind of local critical applications noted above, but these will be an important element in its theoretical advance, alongside lateral connection with concurrent work in, for instance, literary studies, art history and psychology itself. Renov's explorations into the documentation of the self extend our sense of documentary's metaphoric range and its continuing depictive potential. The works of identification and of connection he examines (for intersubjectivity is a key constituent, as well as a function, of the subjective) show documentary's continuing romance of the physical world and its textures as well as its resources for dealing with abstraction and intimation, hope and loss.

Georgina Born, *Uncertain Vision: Birt, Dyke and the Reinvention of the BBC.* **London: Secker & Warburg, 2004, 564 pp.**

JULIE LIGHT

Georgina Born's epic ethnographic study of the BBC opens a new window onto the practical dynamics of public service broadcasting. Despite the fact that the book deals with the tumultuous departure of Dyke and Davies from the BBC, *Uncertain Vision* is primarily about the BBC under Birt. It contends that a decline in creative culture at the BBC was detrimental to programmes and therefore also to the BBC's ability to deliver its public service mission, and argues that, by the end of the 1990s, changes at the BBC contributed to 'a risk-averse broadcast culture in which imitation, populism and sensationalism have become rife' (p. 11).

One of the great values of this book lies in the way it exposes the connections between management practice and the impact it has on a creative community. Having set the scene thoroughly in terms of the political and regulatory context, the book traces in considerable detail changes that were initiated during the late 1990s and early 2000s in commissioning, production and employment at the BBC. We see how the changing management climate and the BBC's response to trends across public services during the period affected the BBC's creative culture, and then how the relative health of that culture was expressed through the programmes produced. In this way *Uncertain Vision* forensically examines the workings of the BBC in a way certainly not seen since Burns's 1977 study of the organization.[1] The book is structured around extensive extracts of research interviews and contemporary accounts by key staff and commentators, many of which make fascinating and amusing reading and which are often thoroughly illuminating, even for someone already familiar with the organization. The book also includes

1   Tom Burns, *BBC: Public Institution and Private World* (London: McMillan, 1977).

substantial segments of Born's own research diaries which reveal much about the idiosyncratic and often secretive ways of the BBC.

Born's principal argument about the declining creative culture at the BBC kicks off with an analysis of Birt's 'Producer Choice'. This initiative was introduced as a means of creating an internal market at the BBC that would bring a new accountability and financial rigour to the organization. She identifies the development of a culture of 'accountancy as morality' as part of the 'marketization' of public service broadcasting and argues that this approach was designed both to see off political criticism and to prepare the BBC for intensifying competition. She discusses how the BBC's attempts to manage the commissioning relationships with independent producers and the 'Broadcast/Production split' implemented in 1996 systematically disempowered the BBC's production community in relation to commissioners and set up a radically unequal market between the in-house producers and independents. The disaggregation of the organization not only prevented different elements of the BBC from working constructively together towards the same public service ends, she argues, but also in-house and independent producers chasing the same valuable commissions in the popular genres tended to lead to increasingly unimaginative programming.

Born then examines the casualization of the workforce, a major feature of the BBC in the 1990s, and how this led to a privatization of ideas as producers were shifted onto short contracts and programme ideas became the commodity with which they could sell themselves to prospective employers. A diminution of skills also occurred as competition for jobs militated against sharing knowledge and the time for training and updating common knowledge resources was squeezed by limited contracts. Both these outcomes, Born argues, were detrimental to the public interest as well as professional standards, despite the fact that they resulted from the drive for efficiency and the opening up of the broadcast market, both of which were expounded at the time as being for the public good. She notes that a rise in 'managerialism' and compliance with the growing trend for demonstrable public accountability created a gap between creative staff and the BBC's management and that this mirrored the incompatibility between the standard business techniques that were being imported into the organization and the '"intangible", "nebulous" nature of the BBC's aims as a public service organisation' (p. 226).

Within this new environment of accountability, Born argues that the 'audience' or 'public' was elevated to the main focus of enquiry and that audience research became a disproportionately dominant tool in the creative process. She observes the growth of schedule-driven commissioning, where available audiences for a specific 'slot' increasingly defined the programme commissioning brief and approach, and comments that even news and current affairs departments which had previously been 'immune' were now feeling the 'long arm of audience research' (p. 281). This, accompanied by the development of the

marketing discipline, had the advantage of making the public service broadcasting values more explicit but also tended to curtail the free use of imagination. The standardization of commissioning briefs, she argues, tended to create significantly more standardized or imitative programmes and this was exacerbated by greater use of stranding and longer programme runs, which made it increasingly rare for channel controllers to commission risky or innovative pieces.

Until this point, *Uncertain Vision* presents its arguments convincingly and its analysis rings true to me as a long-time BBC employee who was also engaged in academic research at the BBC during the period under discussion.[2] However, from this point onwards I find Born's argument less engaging. This is primarily because of an incomplete contextualization of the BBC's position, one which skips over some of the major influences affecting the whole media industry at that time and makes me feel that Born has become afflicted by the BBC's own tendency to operate as if in a world of its own. In relation to the commissioning, briefing and branding of programmes, for example, she makes no comment on the struggles throughout the industry for control of intellectual property or the developing tendency towards metonymic promotion within and across media.[3] In her discussion of audiences, although she notes that segmentation is on the increase across the media industry, its relevance is quickly dismissed because she considers that television is not a medium suited to segmented audiences, an assertion which deserves significantly greater discussion than she presents.

Born develops her point about imitative programming further, offering examples such as the continual blending of genres in the same fashion, and the practice during the commissioning process for potential commissions to be described as a combination of characteristics from existing programming. Other illustrations include the significant growth of programming on the same theme, such as crime drama or lifestyle programming, as well as the increasing prevalence of docusoap. Again, however, this is not contextualized by any discussion of previous (or subsequent) trends in programming and there is little comparison with how the scope, language and process of commissioning before this time impacted on the delivery of public service broadcasting and therefore few grounds on which to make some of her comparisons. There is also no mention of how the vast extension in broadcast hours on television and radio in the 1980s and 1990s[4] affected genres, genre balance or programme quality and her explication of the quality standards by which she is judging these programmes is not particularly clear. Without a debate about these factors, her conclusions come across as more conservative than considered.

The final section of the book deals with the Dyke era and provides an insightful commentary on the outcomes of the Gilligan affair and Hutton inquiry. It also charts some of the initiatives and strategies that Dyke put in place to revitalize creative, collaborative working at the BBC and to build the BBC's digital vision. A few of the comparisons that

2 Julie Light, *Television Channel Identity: the Role of Channels in the Delivery of Public Service Television 1996–2002* (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Glasgow, 2004).

3 See, for example, Scott Lash and John Urry, *Economies of Signs and Space* (London: Sage, 1994); Andrew Wernick, *Promotional Culture: Advertising, Ideology and Symbolic Expression* (London: Sage, 1991).

4 For the BBC alone during the 1980s and 1990s this involved extending to 24-hour broadcasting on both radio and television as well as the launch of BBC News 24, BBC Knowledge, BBC Choice, BBC Parliament and a number of international and joint venture channels.

Born draws between the BBC under Birt and the BBC under Dyke are a little perplexing; the seeds of the digital strategy were, for example, sown during the late 1990s even though they were not implemented until early in Dyke's tenure – why then is the successful digital strategy so strongly attributed to Dyke's vision as opposed to being identified as an effective example of the creative community in action under Birt? Points such as these, however, are small details in the context of the rest of the book. Despite a distinct change in the texture of the observations about organizational dynamics in this last section (the delightfully apposite examples in the earlier part of the book are disappointingly absent from the Dyke chapter), she clearly pinpoints the erosion of energy within the creative community and the deterioration of the ethical identification of staff with the public service broadcasting vision under Birt and how this began to reverse under Dyke in the early 2000s.

Ultimately then, *Uncertain Vision* is a book about the past and the future of public service broadcasting. Underpinning the whole book is Born's contention that the creative health of the production community determines the quality of the programmes produced, and that the programmes produced both condition audience demand and determine the essence of the public service broadcasting proposition at any particular time. In the course of the book, Born draws out the tension between the democratic, public purposes of the BBC and the paradigm of the sovereign consumer. She sets out compelling arguments about the continuing role of public service broadcasting in shaping the British media ecology and why it should not be restricted to the 'market failure' vision promoted by commercial broadcasting interests. However, she appears to see the success of public service broadcasting as at least partly contingent on a vertically integrated organizational model dealing with a unified, un-segmented audience. In a world where the pressures on media organizations have been towards greater segmentation and vertical disaggregation, surely rather than advocating a model suited to a disappearing world, the real challenge for public service broadcasters such as the BBC – and the commentators on their success – is how to continue to deliver public value and audience enjoyment within the new context. *Uncertain Vision* makes an illuminating contribution to the debate by illustrating how a creative community delivers public service broadcasting in practice, and therefore, even at its least forward-looking, it still gives significant food for thought.

Su Holmes and Deborah Jermyn (eds), *Understanding Reality Television.* Abingdon/New York: Routledge, 2004, 302 pp.

Annette Hill, *Reality TV – Audiences and Popular Factual Television.* Abingdon/New York: Routledge, 2005, 231 pp.

Anita Biressi and Heather Nunn, *Reality TV – Realism and Revelation*. London: Wallflower Press, 2005, 183 pp.

HELEN PIPER

The ever-expanding range of programming we now speak of as 'reality TV' was commonly observed to enter a new phase around the turn of the millennium, putting us into what Annette Hill neatly dubs its 'third wave' (p. 24). Closely associated with transmission of the first series of *Big Brother* (Channel 4, 2000–), the shift was accompanied by a discernible intensification of the histrionic commentaries in magazines, tabloids and web-sites with which 'reality' forms are now inter-dependent. Some five years later, it should not be surprising that an erstwhile trickle of academic interest in the popularization of factual programming should begin to resemble a mini-glut of new publications. This review will consider three of these, although I should acknowledge that others are forthcoming, not least Jonathan Bignell's contribution (*Big Brother – Reality TV in the Twenty-First Century*), due for publication in December 2005.

Although all three of the studies under review pay close attention to *Big Brother*, it is the earliest of these, *Understanding Reality Television*, that it most dominates. The series is the central topic or an exemplary text for five of the fourteen chapters in this edited collection, and is cited in most others. This is evidently at the expense of the docusoap, which does not even make it to the index – echoing the manner in which it was

rudely elbowed aside by turn-of-the-century commissioners scrabbling for the 'game-docs' that then came to epitomize the contemporary face of reality TV.

The problem here for television studies is that assumptions about *Big Brother* as the reality form *par excellence* are already looking rather dated, even if – and this is an important qualification – the theoretical modifications prompted by its innovations have a significantly longer shelf-life. In this particular regard I would emphasize Su Holmes's important reconfiguration of Dyer's ordinary/exceptional dialectic that lies at the heart of celebrity and stardom in 'Approaching celebrity in *Big Brother*' and her exposition of the series' paradigmatically 'fervent' pursuit of the 'real self' and the authentic identity. Similarly, by theorizing the intimate temporal dimensions of *Big Brother* and other formats, and re-appraising their (inter)active audiences, Misha Kavka/ Amy West and Estella Tinknell/Parvati Raghuram (respectively) manage to productively develop long-standing textual and cultural concepts.

More so than any previous cycle of generic development, reality TV itself constantly reminds us how fallacious is the desire for an all-explanatory theory or a definitive analysis, and indeed, that there is as yet no consensus as to what 'it' actually is. In their introduction Holmes and Jermyn suggest that this absence of an agreed definition is precisely because it could not be extricated from questions of generic hybridity, specific issues of theory, criticism and methodology, and reality TV's 'relationship with the history and status of the documentary form' (p. 2). Indeed, if the three studies under consideration here have anything in common, it is a shared concern with the *genealogy* of the forms, genres, modes of address, subjects, aesthetic characteristics and thematic preoccupations of this field of programming. Although there is no consensual definition, there is apparently a consensual resistance to one particular idea assumed to be widespread: that reality TV represents a radical departure or innovation in the history of programming. For example, the first three chapters in Holmes and Jermyn's collection each deal with an influential antecedent: Bradley Clissold demonstrates the Cold War ideological resonance of *Candid Camera* (USA, 1948–), Jennifer Gillan exposes how *The Osbournes* (MTV, 2002–) resurrects a 1950s star-sitcom format, and Deborah Jermyn proposes that *Crimewatch* (BBC, 1984–) clearly foreshadowed many contemporary reality programmes (including those altogether unconcerned with crime), partly because of similarities in the 'spectacle of actuality' (p. 72), but also, rather interestingly, because of the manner in which more recent debates appear to mimic the concerns of the controversies that surrounded emerging crime-appeal formats in the 1980s.

A more extensive narrative of evolution is attempted by Anita Biressi and Heather Nunn, whose work, *Reality TV: Realism and Revelation*, places such programming firmly within the domain of the documentary, and purportedly 'breaks new ground . . . by linking together the realist enterprise of reality TV and its relationship to the production of

knowledges (revelation) in mainstream television' (p. 3). Although the authors take pains to insist that their subject is not an inferior form and should be 'treated with respect', they frequently generalize about factual entertainment and its abnegation of the political commitment shown by its forebears. This value distinction is most evident in the first half of the book, which is dedicated primarily to detailed analyses of canonical documentaries and drama-documentaries from the days of the Documentary Movement onwards. The denominator common to these texts appears to be a shared emphasis on the representation and/or self-expression of 'ordinary people', but the reality TV texts assumed to follow in this tradition are typically denounced as poor relations. Hence, for example:

> The complexity of Woolcock's work reveals the unrealised potential of many of the reality TV docusoaps that were produced in the same period to provide a voice for ordinary people in an entertaining fashion. (p. 63)

My objection here is to the typical deployment of 'reality TV docusoaps' (like the 'so many talk shows' of a later discussion) simply as an undifferentiated, negative standard – a point below the waterline. At no point is a popular or landmark series (such as the BBC's *Driving School*) subjected to the depth of analysis, the critical skill or the eloquent description that is reserved for the works of Lindsay Anderson, Ken Loach, Penny Woolcock, Jane Treays, John Edginton, Errol Morris and Andy Warhol. As a strategy this is clearly unjust, and arguably, the comparisons are inappropriate, particularly when so little consideration is given to the differing contexts of production and reception for popular television programmes, 'authored' films and visual art installations, none of which are adequately referenced.

To give credit where it is due, the textual analyses themselves are sensitive and insightful, and there is much here to satisfy an interest in the modes of documentary address, but it is counter-productive to regard popular television through a prism of that which it is not. The first chapter does little to mitigate this, offering only a random and largely extraneous sashay through 'the debates around reality TV'. However, just as I was (rather uncharitably) concluding that none of the research had been conducted with popular television in mind, the book shifts gear and we are into altogether more salient territory. The remaining chapters address, in turn, therapeutic culture, self-revelation, the public expression of private trauma in talk shows and lifestyle programming, the questionable ethics of CCTV and reality crime programming, and lastly an exploration of David Blaine's public incarceration in 'Above the Below'. Much of this (and earlier) material will be familiar from previous publication as articles in *Screen* and other journals, but it makes for a perceptive and incisive contribution and deserves a book format (if not *this* format exactly). I would have been more appreciative had the study engaged more directly with mainstream terrestrial programming.

Moreover, although it is clearly a British study, and the titles of British programmes are constantly offered as (presumably self-evident) examples, the early emphasis on documentary auteurs gives way in later chapters to analyses that privilege American texts such as *The John Walsh Show* and *Judge Judy*, apparently to demonstrate particular extremes (of trends, sensibilities, ideologies). Thus we move from a narrative of what British reality TV could or should have been to a narrative of what it is in danger of becoming. What holds the book tenuously together is less an interest in reality television than a glimpse into its 'cultural moment', although for that at least it deserves some acknowledgement.

I would accept the premise that the aesthetic of contemporary reality TV owes much to the artistic experimentation of an earlier documentary avant garde, but then it also owes much to two centuries of fictive realism, forty-odd years of *Coronation Street*, even more of popular variety entertainment, and – as Annette Hill points out in *Reality TV: Audiences and Popular Factual Television* – decades of tabloid journalism (p. 15). Although, on the one hand, the investigation into the family tree of such complex generic and formal hybrids might therefore threaten to be a rather fatuous exercise, on the other, as Hill also observes, the process of programme categorization is fundamental to the everyday practices of television viewing (pp. 171–5). It seems that audiences are not yet in a position to accept the ontological claims of reality TV without reference to its generic status, but instead

> watch popular factual television with a critical eye, judging the degree of factuality in each reality format based on their experience of other types of factual programming. In this sense, viewers are evaluators of the reality genre, and of factual programming as a whole. (p. 173)

Yet, although the complicated legacy of reality TV is a factor in its reception, one must still wonder at the collective gusto currently being expended in the anxiety to restore what Corner calls 'the specific national history of factual television' to the debate ('Afterword' to Holmes and Jermyn, p. 291). A perception of reality TV as 'radical' does not after all depend upon the purity of its generic innovations, and still less on its political accomplishments (for all the populist cant about 'democratization'). Rather it arises from associated phenomena such as: the shift such an unprecedented volume of reality programming has brought about in what schedulers like to call 'the mix'; the irreversible changes that these programmes have effected in the way in which we understand other, more conventional forms such as 'straight' documentary and drama; the expansion to the notion of what constitutes 'a television text' (to include simultaneous webcam streaming, text messaging, and so forth); the sheer faddish frenzy of everyday discourse that surrounds reality TV and its real/celebrity players; and even, as Daniel Biltereyst argues, the extension of programming marketing to include the whipping up of hostile 'moral panics', henceforth renamed

'media panics' (in Holmes and Jermyn, pp. 105–8). Clearly none of these would represent an *aesthetic* paradigm shift, but surely they amount to a *cultural* one?

Which of course is not to suggest that we should turn our attention away from the television screen, but we may, I think, need reminding that 'radicalism' is not inscribed in the text itself, but in the way it favours change more broadly. In this respect, publication of Annette Hill's qualitative audience research is both timely and necessary. The study sensibly begins with an introduction to the production contexts of reality TV and the discourses around its reception, as well as providing a refreshingly lucid account of its origins. One of her early arguments is that critical condemnation (metaphors of drug addiction and war are apparently much in evidence) 'fails to take into account the variety of formats within the genre' and hence she identifies at least ten common sub-genres such as 'infotainment', 'reality talent' and 'reality life experiment' formats (pp. 7–8). Later she attempts more actively to defend particular programmes and formats on the basis of their capacity to offer debating and learning opportunities.

These opportunities suggest the three main principles around which Hill organizes her findings. Chapters 4, 5 and 6, respectively, consider 'performance and authenticity' (how audiences judge 'truth' according to how real people act), 'the idea of learning' (including the acquisition of informal practical and social understandings) and the 'ethics of care'. These chapters also throw up a number of paradoxes central to the process of watching hybrid popular entertainment. For example: 'the more entertaining a factual programme is, the less real it appears to viewers' (p. 57). Similarly, 'In fictional programming, it is a sign of a good drama if television viewers find it entertaining. In factual programming the reverse is true' (p. 86). However, the real beauty of this section lies in the way Hill extrapolates from viewers' responses an extremely complex, media-literate and ambiguous relationship between 'real people' in the audience, and 'real people' on the television. Arguably, it is this demanding process of 'people watching', and the commensurate need to interpret, weigh up and learn from it, that provides the principal source of audience fascination with these programmes rather than the debased, voyeuristic and even salacious impulses more commonly ascribed to them.

I am far less comfortable with Chapter 6, which jumps from a general discussion of moral philosophy (and its utility) to articulating a quite particular 'ethics of care' drawn from Buddhist and feminist ethical principles. Brave as Hill is to wade into this territory, I do think the sheer complexity of the issues introduced takes the matter beyond the reach of this particular study. Although she is circumspect, the highly selective criteria of moral judgement she proposes themselves work to close off the very questions a discussion of reality TV ethics should be asking. By this I mean questions posed by the fault lines of liberal oppositions between, say, moral boundaries and taste boundaries, or cultural

absolutism and cultural relativism. At the very least, should we not first acknowledge that no 'ethics', however hotly debated, can exist in universalizing isolation from particular and competing religious, social and political traditions? Although in this chapter Hill also introduces issues relating to viewing ethics, she sidesteps them in favour of carving out a potential role for health-based reality programming to foster an 'ethics of care' (particularly in relation to self and family): a role we might once have more confidently described as 'ideological'.

Just as textual approaches begin to wobble when they are obliged to confront broader social changes and to speculate about actual audiences, so too are there limits to the textual analysis and insight available from audience-centred approaches. I think Hill bumps against these limits most noticeably when she attempts to valorize texts by applying the principles she has introduced inductively, but with support from deductions drawn from audience research. So it is that a family focus-group discussion is supplied as evidence that *Changing Rooms* can promote debate about good or bad ways to re-decorate, or what Hill – apparently without irony – calls 'an ethics of care for the home' (p. 128). A rather less forgiving reading of 'makeover' television is available in Gareth Palmer's incisive chapter '"The new you": class and transformation in lifestyle television' (Holmes and Jermyn, pp. 173–90).

The more challenging questions about 'the ethics of watching people's private lives on television' (p. 133) are reduced to an ethical comparison of the different treatment of pet deaths in *Animal Hospital* (BBC 1994–2004) and *Animal ER* (Channel 5, 1998–). It is an interesting discussion and I would not want to underestimate the intense emotions of animal lovers, but it can hardly be considered a rehearsal for the ethical questions that arise about the treatment (and watching) of human subjects. It is no accident that Hill hazards firm injunctions only in respect of children and animals, who are clearly unable to exercise informed consent. Biressi and Nunn tackle rather thornier issues regarding the privatization of public space, and the use/sale of CCTV footage (Chapter 7), but there will continue to be calls for ever greater toughness, not least because the endless reinvention of reality TV has involved the shattering of so many taboos. Mercifully, Hill was sensible enough to offer the previous chapter as an invitation for further debate about ethics, rather than as a definitive word on the matter, and I would have to echo this. Public, journalist-driven debate is already polarizing into a democratizing/debasing dichotomy, in which 'willing participation' or 'right to know' are the inevitable and only responses to claims of misrepresentation or 'breach of privacy'. A vigorous exchange of academic views on the 'radical' moral implications of reality TV might yet enlarge this debate beyond its present boundaries.